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THE CARK of COIN

BY

HARRY LINDSAY

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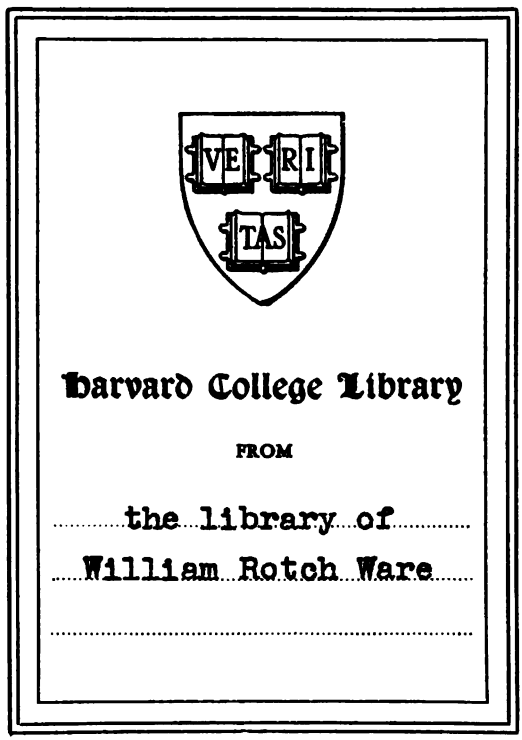

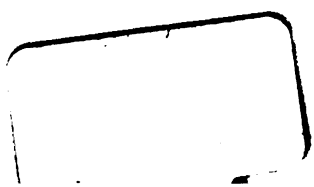

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THE CARK OF COIN

BY

HARRY LINDSAY

AUTHOR OF "MAB," "METHODIST IDYLLS," ETC.

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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"Ring out the narrowing lust of gold."
—*In Memoriam.*

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THE CARK OF COIN

I

LEAVING HOME

THE doctor's dog-cart drew up at the little roadside country railway station, and from it two men stepped down, one elderly and the other a young fellow just emerging from his teens.

"Thank you, doctor," said the elderly man, who wore the dress of a cleric, "I don't know what we should have done but for your kindness. Three miles is a long way a carry such a heavy portmanteau as this even when there are two of us to take it in turn."

"Oh, don't mention it," replied Doctor Atkinson, "It is but a small service to give one a lift on the road, and I am only too delighted to have been of any assistance to you. If I had not overtaken you on the road when I did you would have been quite done up with the weight of that portmanteau long before you arrived here. . . . You said you were not returning to Crosstrees yet awhile? No? Well, I shall be 'round by the Bank in the course of an hour's time, and, if you care to meet me there, I shall be happy to drive you home again. . . . My best wishes to you, Allan, for your success in Rushington!"

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As the doctor's dog-cart rattled away a porter came out from the station and carried the portmanteau, shoulder-high, onto the platform.

"Where for?" he asked.

"Rushington."

"Three-twenty," he replied, and went off to get a label.

The two men were father and son, Jepson by name. The father was the resident Methodist minister at Crosstrees, and he had come down to the railway-station to see his son Allan off to Rushington, whither he was going to commence his life's career as a clerk in a great commercial house in that famous commercial city. It was not the son's first going from home. A great part of his life had been lived away from under the parental roof. At a tender age he had been sent to the great Kingswood Methodist school at Bath where ministers' sons are educated, and it was only during holiday time that he had come directly under home influence from that time forward.

Yet this going away was different from all the others in the past and it affected the two differently. At Kingswood Allan had been under Methodist influence, and the father had entertained no fear for his lad. At Kingswood, too, Allan was in training for the future, and the father felt that the best was being done for his son that could be done. But now the time had come when Allan was to be flung into the midst of a score of conflicting influences, few of them helpful and many of them hostile to the character of his upbringing. All his careful train-

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ing was now to be tested, and the father knew it would be as by fire.

"You won't forget to wire so soon as you arrive, Allan?"

"No, I won't forget, father. It will be the first thing I shall do."

"That's right. Your mother will be waiting anxiously to hear. . . . You have got the letter for Mr. Calvert safe?"

"Oh, yes, it is in my letter-case all right."

"Make straight for the Manse. I have already written to Mr. Calvert and he will be expecting you. He may not be able to find you lodging himself, but he will tell you who can. . . . I haven't seen David Calvert for twenty years, Allan,—twenty years. He and I were at Didsbury together, and we have only met once or twice since we left. . . . David Calvert has been one of the successful ones in life. . . . No, I don't mean that; all I mean is that while my itinerancy has been confined to country circuits, his has been in the town and city circuits, and amongst wealthy people. David got into the right groove at the beginning. . . . I don't mean that exactly either, though I hardly know how to put it differently. . . . But there goes the signal. The train will be here in a few moments now."

"Yes, yonder she comes," said Allan, looking up the line and affecting an indifference by no means felt.

The Reverend Cephas Jepson looked and sighed. He was labouring to be brave, but the father in him was struggling through his outward calm.

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"I can hardly bring myself to believe it, Allan," he said presently.

"Believe what, father?" and Allan, half-suspecting the truth, turned towards his father with pale face and quivering lip.

"That you are going from us, Allan. It seems but yesterday that you were a child filling all the house with light, and now. . . . you are almost a man now, Allan, and going out into the big world to fend for yourself. God help us, how the time flies!" and there was a sob in the minister's voice.

"Would you have me always a child, father?" asked Allan, with a catch in his own voice.

"No. . . . I don't know. . . . I really think your mother would."

"Well, that cannot be," said Allan.

"No, that cannot be," said Mr. Jepson despondently.

"And the light is not going out of the house, father, because I am leaving it."

"You cannot understand, Allan, you cannot undestand. You are too young."

"I will bring a new light into the home!"

Mr. Jepson looked up into his lad's face with pride.

"When you hear of me doing well in Rushington and carrying all before me, it will be a new light, father——"

"It will be the veritable sunshine of Heaven, my son," said Mr. Jepson, his face brightening.

"At any rate, of one thing you may be sure, father,—I will never bring any discredit on your name," and

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Allan's voice shook with emotion as he uttered these words.

Mr. Jepson grasped his son's hand warmly. "I have no fear of that, Allan, no fear of that," and, just then, the train steamed into the station.

A few minutes more, the last good-byes were said, and the train steamed away again. Mr. Jepson stood on the platform watching till it curved out of sight, and turned away with a heavy heart. As he did so he suddenly came face to face with an aged minister who had that moment entered the station.

"Train gone, Mr. Jepson?" he asked panting.

"Yes, gone,—just gone. Were you hoping to catch it?"

"Yes,—yes," answered the aged minister with difficulty, for he had plainly over-exerted himself. "I thought. . . . I would have been. . . . in time. I wanted to have. . . . a last hand-shake. . . . with Allan. I met Doctor Atkinson . . . . and he told me you were here . . . . to see the lad off."

"It is very good of you, Mr. McPherson, and Allan would have been greatly cheered to have seen you at the station. But I am afraid you have walked too hard and may have used yourself up for the day. Come, take my arm, and I will accompany you home. It was my intention to call on you. I felt that I must see you at this crisis in my life."

Mr. McPherson was the supernumerary minister at Crosstrees, the circuit of which Mr. Jepson was superintendent. Years before, when Mr. Jepson was a younger

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man, Mr. McPherson had been his superintendent, but now their positions, by the ravages of time, were reversed. And yet, such was the intimate relationship between the two men, nothing of importance passed in the Crosstrees circuit without the elder minister's advice being sought and taken by the younger. Indeed, Mr. Jepson consulted his venerable friend on almost everything that concerned him, whether in relation to circuit or personal matters, and had done so ever since he had served under Mr. McPherson's superintendency. A touching affection held the two men together.

"And how has Allan taken it?" asked Mr. McPherson as they went along arm-in-arm together.

"Bravely—bravely," replied Mr. Jepson. "But——"

"Yes,—and you, my friend?"

"Foolishly, I am afraid. It's affected me as nothing has before."

"That is not to be wondered at. It wouldn't be a father's heart that could let his son go from home without greeting."

In his private life, Mr. McPherson, who had at all times a strong Scotch accent in his speech, often fell into his homely vernacular again.

"The trouble is," said Mr. Jepson, after a pause, "that Allan should have to leave home at all."

The old man turned his head and gazed with pity into his friend's face. He suspected the feeling that was behind the words.

"If I had my time to go over again," went on Mr. Jepson, "I would go in for a settled pastorate."

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Mr. McPherson did not answer, and for several minutes the two men walked along together in silence. At another time much might have been said, but not then. With unerring instinct the supernumerary minister recognised that his friend was only speaking out of the bitterness of the moment, and that his words in no way expressed his calmer mood. Besides, who that was a Methodist minister had not, at some time or other of his life, felt and said the same? The wear and tear of the itinerancy tried the strongest men at times and made them long, in weak moments, for settled pastorates. And, indeed, it was no light thing to be compelled to strike one's tent every three years and pitch it in new pastures amidst fresh scenes and under untried conditions. But, like everything else in the world, it had its compensations. The glory of the itinerancy was that the minister's influence was not circumscribed; his parish was as large as his country; in the course of his life's ministry he passed from north to south, from east to west, and tens of thousands came under his influence. That was the compensating advantage. It was a good thing to be put in the way of influencing the few for righteousness, but it was a blessing of outstanding greatness to be privileged to influence the many.

And so Mr. Jepson acknowledged it when at last his aged friend put it to him in that way. But not without reservation.

"For all that," he said, "there is the other side. What about one's influence on his own family? What about the hold he has on his own children? Parting from

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Allan to-day has been a terrible wrench to me, just at the time when he needed my help and counsel most. Had I had him coming home every night after his day's work in the city, how much better it would have been for both him and me!"

"Yes, and for others."

"The itinerancy is all right until the children come and begin to grow up in the home. Then comes the difficulty. You know Silvester? He was my superintendent in my second circuit, and a finer man I never travelled with. What has been his experience? During the last twenty years Conference has sent him into circuits that might easily be connected on the map by a line drawn from Northumberland to Surrey, and, in all the intermediate counties he has been leaving his children one by one at almost every change. The last time I saw him he told me humorously, at least he pretended he was speaking humorously, though the pity of it trembled in his words and was at once apparent, that he no longer sang that verse of the hundred and fortieth hymn, 'My company has gone before,' but had changed the words for what was more of truth to him, 'My company is left behind.'"

For many another man there might have been humour in these words, but there was none for Mr. McPherson. He understood too well the awful tragedy hidden in the words, an everyday tragedy in many a Methodist minister's life, and he could say nothing. All he could do was to allow his stricken friend, Mr. Jepson, to talk his heart out without comment or opposition, and silently to commend him to the greater Father while he talked.

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II

AMONGST NEW FRIENDS

MEANTIME Allan arrived safely in Rushington and lost no time in making his way to the home of his father's friend, the Reverend David Calvert. Mr. Calvert was in his study, busy upon the next Sunday's sermon when Allan was announced, but he at once set his work aside and laid himself out to make his old friend's lad as comfortable as possible.

"Welcome, my young friend!" he exclaimed heartily, giving Allan his hand, "for your father's sake, welcome! . . . . Yes, I got his letter all right,—and this? Well, I will read this while you are washing. Come, let me show you the way up to the bathroom. Is your father well? That's right; I am glad to hear it. He was my dearest friend at Didsbury, but somehow we have not corresponded for years till now. When a man gets into the thick of his life's work, he finds little time for friendly correspondence. He becomes absorbed with one thing or another. But there, I don't know that I should blame life's duties for it altogether. Old friends *could* correspond if they *would*. And they ought, they really ought. They ought to let nothing stand in the way of such friendly intercourse. Life would keep greener and

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fresher for us if we only endeavoured to hold our early friendships. . . . Well, here we are. You will find everything you require, I think, and, when you have washed, we will talk matters over downstairs."

Mr. Calvert was standing under the gas-lamp in the hall reading Mr. Jepson's letter when Allan at length came downstairs.

"You will feel a thousand times better now," said Mr. Calvert, turning to greet Allan. "There is nothing that freshens one up so after a long day's journey as a good wash. Come in here," and Mr. Calvert threw open the drawing-room door. "But no, there's no fire here; come up into my study. . . . Yet,—one moment," and the minister halted at the foot of the stairs to call out, "Mary! Mary!" a reply, a moment afterwards, coming from the neighbourhood of the kitchen. "When did Mrs. Calvert say she would return?"

"She hoped to be home in time for tea, sir."

Mr. Calvert looked at his watch. "Well, it is almost tea-time now. . . . You could do with a cup of tea?" he asked, turning again to Allan. "Oh, nonsense, man," he exclaimed when Allan refused, "you must be famished after your long journey . . . . Mary!"

"Yes, sir?"

"We will not wait for the others. We will have tea at once; or, at least, as soon as you can get it ready. Mr. Jepson has had nothing to eat since he left Crosstrees," and, having thus delivered himself, Mr. Calvert led the way up into the study.

"Well now, as to your lodgings," he began without

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any preamble when they were seated, but stopped abruptly to say, "See, Allan, is it not?"

"Yes, Allan is my name."

"And it must be Allan with me. I couldn't 'Mister' you if I tried. Your father was simply Cephas to me, or oftener just 'old Ceph,' and I could never twist my tongue into 'mistering' his son. It would be too formal altogether, outrageously formal—a turning of things topsy-turvy. Fancy calling the father 'old Ceph' and the son, 'Mister'! No mortal man could do it."

"And I hope you will never be able to do it," said Allan impulsively. "If I am called by my Christian name I shall at least feel that I have one friend in this big city."

"Oh, as to that, you will soon make plenty of friends here. But now we understand each other. It is to be Allan, and nothing but Allan here. But I was saying—let me see?"

"As to my lodgings."

"Yes, about your lodgings. As yet I have made no enquiries—I haven't had time—and you will remain with us for a few days. Until such time, at any rate, as you grow dissatisfied with us. . . . You will never grow dissatisfied? Oh, don't say that. You don't know us yet," and Mr. Calvert roared at his own joke.

"But, seriously, Allan, I think you will be far better able to choose lodgings for yourself than I could choose them for you. Of course I can recommend you to several places. There are several of our people who would only be too delighted to have you as tenant of their rooms,

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but—well, you must choose for yourself after you have had time to look round. Meantime, you are my guest."

"But——" Allan was beginning when the minister interrupted him.

"Oh, come now," he said, "there are no 'buts' about it, and what I have just told you is what is arranged for you. It is fixed, and, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unalterable—at any rate, for the present. . . . You said your father was well? How is he looking?"

"Not so well as he might be, I thought, as he saw me off at the station."

"Over-anxious looking?"

"Yes, I think that had something to do with it."

"Oh, well, we will soon settle him on that score. By-the-bye, have you wired your arrival?"

"Yes, from the station."

"That's right. It will make him easy about your safety, at any rate. . . . But what I meant a moment ago was: How is he carrying his years? He is getting on now—we are both getting on. We are in the fifties, and a man may begin to look out for the approach of old age when he has touched his half century. But—hello! there goes the door-bell; Mrs. Calvert and Edith returning. They have been out together shopping. We shall soon have some tea now."

A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Calvert, a lady with a sweet and motherly face, came into the room.

"Home again, mother?" were the minister's words of greeting.

"And right glad to get home, David. I am tired out,"

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and she was about to drop into a chair when she caught sight of Allan.

"My old friend Jepson's son, mother," said the minister, introducing Allan, "Mrs. Calvert—Allan."

"You are soon on familiar terms," said Mrs. Calvert, smiling and giving Allan her hand. "Well, no wonder, since you are Cephas Jepson's son. Mr. Calvert is never tired of talking of your father. Ever since we were married, and even before it, it has been Cephas Jepson this and Cephas Jepson that—there is no man in all the world like Cephas Jepson to Mr. Calvert's thinking. . . . Well, I am pleased to meet you, Allan—I suppose I must call you by that name, too—and I hope you will be happy here, and find Rushington all you hope it to be. Mr. Calvert has doubtless told you of our wish that you should remain here with us for a while?"

Allan said that Mr. Calvert had done so, and that he considered it a great kindness.

"Kindness!" exclaimed Mrs. Calvert. "What are friends for but to show kindness? Yet, as to that, your stay here will be a great kindness to us. We get awfully low-spirited at times, and want waking up a little. But, have you had anything to eat since you came in?"

"No, he has not," answered the minister, "and I am sure he must be almost famished. I told Mary to get tea ready at once, but——"

"Then I will just take my things off and see about it," and Mrs. Calvert went bustling away.

"She is very good," Allan murmured.

"You will say so when you know her," said the min-

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ister proudly. "There is not another woman her equal anywhere. . . . What has led you to choose a business career?"

Allan said frankly that he had been reading of the great fortunes made by business men, and that he had the desire to emulate them. Not that he cared for money itself as such, but it seemed to him that nothing was possible in the world without money. With money a man was counted a man, but without it he was—nothing.

The Reverend David Calvert's face clouded as he listened to these words.

"Yes," he said regretfully, after a moment's pause, "there is, I am sorry to agree, a great deal of truth in what you say, but it is not all truth, Allan, not all truth. I grant you that the men with the big money-bags are the men——"

"Money opens all doors," said Allan impulsively.

"No, not all," replied the minister, "not all, thank God! There is one door at least which no amount of money can open."

"And that is——?"

"The door of Heaven, Allan. . . . You didn't mean that—no, of course, you did not, but still it is as well to bring it into your reckoning. It is worth it."

Allan dropped his eyes. Not only the minister's words, but the earnestness in which they were spoken affected him strangely. In coming to Rushington, he certainly had not shut Heaven out of his consideration, but—well, he could not help acknowledging to himself that he had put his thought of money-making in the first place.

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"There are scores of men in Rushington," presently went on the minister, "whose one aim is to make money, and—they make it, Allan. There is no city in the world where men can make money faster than in Rushington, and, if men will lay themselves out to make money here, they will make it. I could put my finger on half a dozen men here as examples of this; wealthy men who were but poor boys years ago, and they made all their money in this city. But—well, you will find things out for yourself, Allan. . . . Only, let me beg of you with all the earnestness I can, not to follow their example. The lust of gold has ruined many a fine nature, and I beg of you, on the threshold of life, to keep your heart free from this narrowing lust. . . . But I won't preach to you, and there goes the gong for tea. Only, Allan, remember! As you love your soul remember!"

A subdued light, filtering through the rose-coloured globes on the chandelier, pervaded the tea-room as they entered, giving the whole place an air of warmth and cheer. Mrs. Calvert was already seated at the table before a small silver tea-urn, and, standing behind a chair at one side of the table, with her hands resting lightly on the frame of the chair, was the minister's only daughter, a young girl of about Allan's own age.

"Allan," said the minister, "will you take the chair opposite to Edith? . . . Oh, by-the-bye, you have not been introduced. You have heard me speak of my old friend, Cephas Jepson, Edith? This is his son, Allan; my daughter, Edith, Allan."

Allan bowed, and Edith returned the compliment grace-

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fully. But she did more than that. She also held out her hand across the table, and, in the hand-clasp that followed, Allan felt that Edith's welcome was as cordial and as sincere as her parents' had been.

All through the tea-time, Allan could scarcely take his eyes off her. She was by no means pretty, and, therefore, it was not her beauty of face that held him. But neither was she plain-looking. Hers was one of those faces that are winsome without being exactly pretty, and there was a rare tenderness in its habitual expression, which at once stamped it as that of one to whom anyone in trouble might go with confidence and find sympathy and help. Yet there was a light in the eyes which plainly showed that their owner could be both vigorous and assertive on occasion, and Allan soon discovered by her animated conversation that she could be vivacious also.

"Of course you were at Kingswood, Allan?" asked the minister, in one of the pauses in the conversation.

"Oh, yes."

"You didn't go in for a degree, I suppose?"

"I took my Intermediate in Arts, but got plucked in my final."

"Oh, that was a pity. London?"

"Yes."

"Think of trying again?"

"I have no thought of it at present, and I suspect the career upon which I am about to enter will occupy all my time."

"Yes, I am afraid so. Business life will keep you at it, and a man has to have all his wits about him if he

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means to succeed. But you must not give up your studies altogether. Even in business life you will find them helpful. I should strongly advise you to have a try at the final again. A degree gives one a status that nothing else can. It is the hall-mark, so to speak. . . . Edith has just taken her Intermediate—taken honours."

Allan looked across the table at Edith, whose face had suddenly become suffused with a delicate pink.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Calvert——"

"Edith," interpolated the minister.

Allan coloured. "Does Miss Calvert permit me the familiarity?" he asked gallantly.

"Oh, yes, I have no objection," smiled Edith, and Allan coloured still more deeply.

"Then I must be Allan," he said.

"As you wish," answered Edith, colouring again.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Calvert, "we are all one family here."

"I was only going to say," Allan went on, "that Miss —that you—that Edith," turning to the minister, "has done much better than I. All I got was a First Class."

"And that is not to be despised," said Edith.

"Well, not exactly," Allan agreed.

"And," said the minister, addressing Allan, "it is *prima facie* a good reason why you should go in for your final."

"It would mean a lot of work," said Allan.

"Well, you are not afraid of that?" demanded Edith, and Allan felt himself getting into the meshes of a net

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from which he knew that once he was entangled there would be no escape.

"I mean," he said, "I should have to brush up a good deal."

"When did you take your Intermediate?"

"Two years since."

"That is not very long ago."

"No, but——"

"Have you seen the syllabus for the next final?"

"No."

"Then I will show it to you after tea," said Edith, "and also some of my books."

"Will you?" and Allan's face brightened with delight, so much so that Edith noticed it, and felt within herself that she had allowed her enthusiasm for her studies to carry her just a trifle too far; at any rate, too far with a perfect stranger such as Allan Jepson was.

Nevertheless, when tea was over, the two repaired into Edith's sanctum to look over her books, and were soon in deep and earnest conversation, not only upon books, but upon many things which they appeared to have in common. The time passed so rapidly that they were quite unaware that nearly an hour had gone when Mr. Calvert came into the room, saying:

"Well, what is the verdict?"

They both looked up together, and both blushed.

"I am afraid," said Allan, recovering himself and laughing, "I have come to no decision yet. Still—perhaps, it is worth considering."

"Well, you will see. Best not to come to any decision

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till you find out what leisure your business allows you. It would never do to burn the candle at both ends. But, if you have time and opportunity, you couldn't employ yourself better."

"Meantime," said Allan, with a twinkle in his eye, "I am in the right place to catch the fever for study from Edith's enthusiasm."

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III

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

NEXT morning Allan made his first entry into the business life of Rushington. The firm in which, through the kind offices of one of his father's friends, he was afforded an opening, was that of Messrs. Mornington T. Grayson, Blake, and Company, a firm widely-known, highly-respected, and greatly feared—widely-known because of its great commercial ramifications in almost all parts of the world; highly respected because of its vigorous, smart, and up-to-date methods of transacting its business; greatly feared because of the terrible strain its competition put on other houses in Rushington and elsewhere.

Allan himself felt something of this fear the moment he came within sight of the building. For a purely business house it was the largest he had ever seen, occupying, as it did, the four sides of a square in the very heart of the city. Round it on all sides were other business houses of importance, but they each and all seemed dwarfed by the size of this enormous structure. But what struck the greatest fear to Allan's heart was the vast number of men pouring into the building. Literally hundreds of clerks, salesmen, warehousemen, and other employees were streaming through the great doors into the building, to

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be swallowed up the next moment as in a great gulf. In that vast throng Allan felt that he would be lost immediately. A mere unit amidst the crowd, how could he preserve his identity, or hope to be observed? How could he hope to succeed? For Allan had not come to Rushington with the simple hope of earning his living only, but of climbing to the highest rungs of the ladder of success; and, with the view that anything short of that would be failure. But he had not counted upon such competition as he now saw must necessarily take place where so many were concerned. Still, he was not going to begin by lowering his ideal one jot. So he put on a brave heart and entered the building with the stream.

Once inside, the vastness of the concern in which he had come to play a humble part impressed him still more greatly. The spacious entrance hall, with its tessellated pavement, parti-coloured tiled walls, and swinging glass doors on every side, through which scores of men were constantly coming and going with strained and eager faces, appealed powerfully to Allan's imagination, and again made him feel the insignificant unit that he was. For a few moments he stood amazed and irresolute, not knowing which way to turn. No one seemed to notice him; at least, no one spoke to him, until, at length, the commissionaire, marching up and down the hall as a sentinel on beat, came face to face with him standing there.

"Is Mr. Watson within?" asked Allan.

"Mr. Watson? I really don't know. I have not seen him pass in. But," looking at a great clock in the hall,

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"it is scarcely his time yet. He rarely comes down till ten."

Allan felt in a fix. His orders were to be at the office at 8.30 sharp, and he did not know the name of another person in the building. Fortunately, at that moment, a smartly-dressed young fellow, wearing an eye-glass, was just then coming towards them, and the commissionaire handed Allan over to him.

"This gentleman wants to see Mr. Watson," explained the commissionaire.

"Mr. Watson? Won't be here to-day. Called to London on the firm's business. Is that a letter you have for him?"

"No, not for him—from him," Allan replied, and showed the letter.

A glance at it was sufficient to reveal its purpose, and then the young fellow said cheerily, "Oh, come this way, Mr. Hughes will put you right. Mr. Hughes is the chief of the counting-house, and I suspect that is where you will begin duties. Mr. Hughes generally gets down by nine, and it is getting on that way now."

In the counting-house several boys were bringing up the books from the strong-room and placing them on the desks ready for use. These ponderous volumes, too heavy to carry, the boys wheeled into the counting-house in small trucks. Allan watched them with interest. Everything was new to him, and totally different from what he had imagined; and everything was withal done on a scale so vast that he felt amazed. He watched the various clerks gathering for their work, and noted how they

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all went to their respective desks without confusion or delay; and, on the stroke of nine, Mr. Hughes came in, and the business of the day was soon in full swing.

Presently Mr. Hughes intimated to Allan by messenger that he wished to see him in his private room, and Allan at once obeyed the summons. He had observed that the young fellow with the eye-glass had already called the chief's attention to his presence.

"You are Mr. Jepson, I take it?" began Mr. Hughes, referring to a note held in his hand.

Allan said he was.

"I see from Mr. Watson's note that you are coming here as a novice?"

Allan assented.

"Then you will have to begin at the very beginning. You don't object to that?"

"Oh, no," replied Allan, "I should prefer it."

"Just so. A proper knowledge of any business can only be obtained by starting from the bottom and going through all its stages step by step. But let me warn you at once, there are men in this building to-day who have never got away from the bottom, though they have been here for years, and at the bottom they will remain till they die. The fact is they have got no aptitude, no push, no go, no initiative, and so they continue to slave just where they were placed when they first came here. There are others, who came here long after them, who are now earning princely incomes, but they are men of ideas and daring. Now, these are the kind of men we want here,

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and we soon find them out when they come. You understand what I mean?"

Allan said he did, and was about to express the hope that he might soon prove himself to be fit and capable, when the chief interrupted him in his brisk, decisive manner.

"We cannot do with drones here, and men of mediocrity are as plentiful as blackberries in autumn. A man who can throw his whole soul into the business and help to make it go will always be sure of recognition here."

He touched the push of an electric bell as he spoke, and the young fellow with the eye-glass came into the room.

"Oh, Mr. Fairclough," said Mr. Hughes, "will you take Mr. Jepson under your care to-day and show him his work?" and, a few minutes afterwards, Allan was seated on a high stool next to Charlie Fairclough, entering the invoices of the day before into a great ledger.

The morning passed quickly enough for Allan, and, at one o'clock, he was told that he might have an hour's respite for dinner. With Charlie Fairclough and three others he, therefore, went to a neighbouring café, where he saw scores of other men, seated at little marble-topped tables, partaking of their noon-day meal.

"What are you going to have, Jepson?" asked Fairclough, when they were all seated at one of these small tables.

Allan took up the menu card, and, while he was looking at it, a waitress came to take their orders. Instantly she was assailed with chaff by the others, but she met it

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all with good-humour, and gave back as much as she received.

"What are *you* having, Fairclough?" asked one of the fellows.

"Chops and tomato sauce," replied Fairclough, whereat the others laughed uproariously.

"Oh, come, Fairclough," said one, with pretended reproach in his tone.

"None of your Pickwickian dinners here," said another.

"Or it may become another *cause célèbre*," said a third.

Whether or not the waitress understood the references, Allan did not know, but she stood smiling good-humouredly.

"Come, gentlemen," she said at length, "what is it to be? I cannot stand here all day, you know. There are others waiting to be served."

At that they gave their orders, and then a few minutes' quiet ensued, during which Charlie Fairclough sat drumming with his fingers on the table and whistling in an undertone one of the popular street songs. The title of the song caught the ears of the others, and the flood-gates of talk were again opened.

"Been to the *Gaiety* yet, Fairclough?" asked one of the company, a young fellow named David Daggers.

Fairclough said that he had not, and, thereupon, Daggers volubly explained how at the *Gaiety* the other night he had heard the inimitable "Bella" sing the song, the tune of which Fairclough had been whistling. "Never heard anything better in my life before," Daggers as-

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serted, "and I doubt if there is another woman on the boards who could sing it as 'Bella' does. She does it A1. You must really hear 'Bella,' Fairclough. Everybody is going, and to miss her would be to miss the greatest treat of a lifetime."

Fairclough said that he was much more interested in a good football match, and would any day prefer to stand in a blowing wind and a pelting rain watching one than be shut up in a stuffy, vile-smelling music hall listening to the finest "star" that ever sang. Such art had never any charms for him, he said. His line was watching trials of strength and skill—a football match, a cricket match, a boxing match, and horse-racing were the things which appealed to him. In such things there was something noble and manly, but in the silly, sentimental music-hall songs—faugh! they disgusted him.

"And yet you were just now whistling 'Bella's' latest success?" said Daggers.

"I didn't know that it was 'Bella's'—and who 'Bella' is I am sure I neither know or care. As for the song, I know no more of it than the tune. One hears it everywhere almost, and I suppose it has got on my brain like Mark Twain's 'Punch, brothers, punch.' But it is a hateful droning, and I wish I could get it out of my mind altogether."

"I will give you a remedy," said another of the company laughingly. His name was Hugh Bottomley. "When you feel the plaguy thing coming on you again, strike up with 'I Want to Be an Angel,'" and, amidst general laughter, Hugh Bottomley added in serio-comic

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tones, "It is a specific for that kind of madness. I can recommend it."

Just then the waitress returned, bringing with her on a tiny tray the ordered dinners, and there was more chaff and more laughter. Allan looked on and listened in amazement. He was not wholly inexperienced in the world's ways, but he could not help feeling that his companions carried their chaff beyond the bounds of politeness. The waitress's good humour, in his opinion, had nothing to do with it, and her smart and witty retorts seemed to him altogether unbecoming to her. But the fault was not hers. She was just what his companions, and others such as they, had made her. But that a young girl should be subjected in such a place to such bantering seemed a pitiable thing to Allan in his innocency, and that his companions were the offenders did not raise them in his estimation.

But the thing which surprised Allan most of all was the character of the conversation carried on all through the meal. There was absolutely nothing elevating about it. For the most part it was made up of small talk about theatres and sport and such like. Of serious conversation there was absolutely nothing, except when Hugh Bottomley, once or twice, tried to steer the conversation into business matters. But he was only laughed at for his pains and told not to "talk shop." Yet "shop" was just the one thing Hugh Bottomley loved to talk about. Neither the music-hall songs which Daggers loved so well, nor the sport which so appealed to Charlie Fairclough were of the slightest interest to Hugh Bottomley.

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His whole soul was taken up with his work, and he went into it day by day with an earnestness and enthusiasm which had already won him favour in the eyes of his superiors in the firm. Morning, noon, and night his one thought was of his business, and he was never so happy as when in the midst of it. As yet he was only in the counting-house, but his ambition was to get sent into one of the great departments of the warehouse, where he would have a better chance for the exercise of his talents, and it was for this that he was labouring might and main. And, so it came to pass, that when the dinner was over and the young fellows repaired to the smoke-room, Bottomley did not accompany them, but found his way, as was his custom on 'Change to pick up what he could.

"Do you play billiards, Jepson?" asked Fairclough.

Allan did not play.

"Never learned?"

"Never."

Fairclough sat smoking a while in silence.

"See, you are a Methodist, I think?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you would consider billiard playing sinful?"

Allan coloured deeply.

"No, I should not," he answered. "What put it into your head to imagine that my Methodism should make me think that? You must fancy we are a narrow-minded set."

Fairclough laughed, but made no reply, and, Daggers, lighting a new cigarette, offered to play Charlie a game. So they all went upstairs to the billiard-room, where they

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found many tables already occupied by men whiling away the dinner-hour.

Allan took a seat on the side form that ran all round the room to watch them, and the fourth young fellow of their party seated himself beside him.

"How do you think you will like Rushington?" he asked.

Allan had observed the young fellow closely at the dinner-table as one who had spoken little, and who had been almost disregarded by the others.

"Oh, I hardly know yet. But I dare say I will get to like it after a while. Excuse me, but I forget your name?"

"Walters—Fred Walters, though at home it was always Freddie."

Allan glanced at him. There was something about him altogether different from the others, and the way he had lingered on that "Freddie" struck Allan as full of meaning.

"You are a native of Rushington?" Allan asked.

"No, I am not," and he uttered the words with indignant emphasis. "I come here from Herefordshire."

"Have you been long in Rushington?"

"Four years."

"And do *you* like it?"

"I hate it," he answered, almost hissing out the words from between his clenched teeth.

"Then, why do you stay?"

"Where am I to go? What am I to do if I go from here? I have given the firm the best four years of my life—and for what? For nothing, absolutely nothing.

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I am where I was when I first came here, and I will remain where I am to the end of the chapter. It is too late for me to turn my back on it now. I am still young, twenty-three only, but I am too old to begin anything new."

Allan's heart was strangely drawn out towards his companion. Freddie Walters appealed to him as the others did not. He tried to rally him with some words of cheer.

But Freddie Walters' eyes were blazing.

"They hold out all sorts of promises and inducements to you when you come here," he went on with rising passion, as if he were discharging his soul of the burdens of past wrongs, "but they only do it to get you fast. It is a beautiful dream they picture to you, but it is only a dream, and they keep you dreaming it until at last you awaken with horror to find yourself chained for life. . . . Look here, Jepson, the chances of getting on in Rushington are one against a hundred. By far the greater number of young fellows who come here with their heads filled with beautiful dreams end with becoming slaves at twenty-five shillings a week. There is scarcely one in a hundred who gets away from that figure, unless—unless," and Freddie began to stammer in his passion, "unless they learn to grow unscrupulous, cruel, and heartless."

Allan was shocked. He could not answer. Freddie's hot words, plainly spoken in great sincerity of belief, had wrought upon his heart powerfully. And, just then, Fairclough came up to them, saying:

"Do you fellows see the time? We have only five minutes left to get back to the office. Come along."

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IV

SISTER MARION

ALLAN was glad when the day was done and he was able to get home again. Yet it was not home. In his heart he wished it were. He had nothing of which to complain. The Calverts were kind and good, but Allan felt that above all things his desire just then was to get amongst his own. The first symptoms of home-sickness were upon him, by no means an unmanly ailment, though it necessarily unmans those attacked by it. If it had been his father's house to which he was bending his steps, how he would have quickened them! Had it been his mother and sister to whom he was going after his first day's experience in the city, how gladly would he have unburdened his heart to those dear ones! There were sympathy and counsel and encouragement at home such as he could not hope for elsewhere. He would have given all he possessed to have had that evening at home.

Life, however, is full of compensations, and the warm welcome given Allan at the Manse on his return from the City made him feel the truth of one of his father's beloved quotations, that "the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb."

"Well, Allan, my boy, how have you got on to-day?"

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asked Mr. Calvert, grasping his hand in a truly fatherly fashion.

"Oh, as well as I could," answered Allan.

"And that is all that can be expected from anyone—to do as well as one can. But, do you think you will like it—your work, I mean?"

Allan thought so. But he could hardly say yet. His work had only been initiatory, and he could gather from it no proper idea of what was expected from him in the future. However, he had made up his mind to like his work. That appeared to him the only way to succeed in it, and to succeed he was determined. He had come to Rushington with that definite aim, and he intended straining all his powers to carry it out.

As to the "fellows"? Oh, well, it was, perhaps, too soon to pass an opinion on them. Some of them, he thought, were rather loose in their ways, but then he felt that he must not judge everyone by his own standard. The way of the world was broader than his conception of it, and his training and upbringing were all against looseness and levity. But, perhaps, the "fellows" were, after all, not so bad as they pretended. It seemed to him that there was a good deal of make-believe and masquerading going on amongst young fellows in Rushington, and he would like to know more about them before judging. At any rate, all in his office had been kind to him, and all seemed anxious to make him at home. In a week's time he would have a better idea of things.

Mr. Watson? No, he had not seen Mr. Watson. He

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was away—called to London on company business, and they did not know at the office when he would be back. From what he had heard of him that day, Mr. Watson was a self-made man. He had risen from the lowest rung of the ladder, and was now the managing director of the firm. A Methodist? No, he had not heard that said, but, of course, he knew it. His father had got him his position in the firm through Mr. Watson's influence.

After tea, Mr. Calvert went off to a meeting at his church, and Allan sat down to write home. It was a long, long letter, such as first letters at these times are apt to be, a letter in which he told his father everything that had happened to him since he left home. He omitted nothing, laying his whole heart bare to his loved ones. When he had finished he felt better and stronger. It is wonderful what ease comes through relieving the heart, when there is a sympathetic ear into which to pour one's troubles.

Allan posted his letter, and then joined the ladies in the drawing-room. Edith had set aside her studies for the night. It was not well, she said, to be always at work, and it was her habit to take a night off occasionally. Allan wondered whether he ought not to emphasise the word "occasionally" for her, and whether, in the palpable conspiracy afoot to make him at home, she had not fallen into pardonable subterfuge.

"Do you play?" Edith asked presently, pointing to the piano.

Allan said that he did.

Would he then play something?

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"With pleasure," Allan assented, and at once sat down to the piano. He ran his fingers lightly over the keys, but stopped abruptly when he had played a few bars, and asked, "Do you play, Edith?"

"Sometimes," she answered, smiling.

"Not so often as she used to do when she was not studying so hard," said Mrs. Calvert from her chair, where she was sitting, working at a piece of embroidery.

"What songs have you?" asked Allan, and Edith produced a great pile, from which Allan selected several which he knew well.

"Now, if you will play," he said, "I will sing."

He sang two songs, and then Edith asked him to exchange places, and said that she would sing while he played. Afterwards Edith produced a violin and, while Allan accompanied her on the piano, she played exquisitely Rubinstein's Sonata in D major. Then Allan took the bow and Edith accompanied him, and thus the evening passed pleasantly till at last Mr. Calvert came home.

Mr. Calvert was accompanied by a young lady habited in a dress of sombre hue, with a plain bonnet tied on under the chin, and with a long fall depending from the bonnet behind. She had one of the sweetest faces that Allan had ever set eyes upon.

"Sister Marion," announced Mr. Calvert, and Edith sprang forward to welcome her.

"I have not come to stay," said Sister Marion. "I was just passing when I met Mr. Calvert, and thought I

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would like to look in. How are you, Edith?" and she kissed her affectionately. "And you, dear Mrs. Calvert, it seems an age since I saw you last."

"Yes, you truant," said Mrs. Calvert, shaking her finger reproachfully, "what have you to say for yourself? . . . Oh, yes, I know," interrupting the sister, "what you are going to say. It is always the Mission, the Mission, that all-absorbing Mission. And you are looking like it also. You are just working yourself to death, dear, and, if you do not slacken a little, I will go to Mr. Rosson myself and give him a piece of my mind."

Sister Marion laughed lightly, and turned to Mr. Calvert. At that moment she became suddenly aware of Allan's presence in the room.

"Allow me, Sister," said the minister. "Mr. Allan Jepson, son of an old college chum of mine; Allan, Sister Marion of the great Rushington Mission."

"Mr. Jepson—Mr. Jepson?" mused Sister Marion, "where have I heard that name before? Did you say Mr. Jepson's father was a minister?"

Mr. Calvert answered in the affirmative.

"Oh, I have it now, I think. Did your father, Mr. Jepson, ever travel in the Pontypool Circuit?"

"Yes," said Allan. "Did you know him there?"

"Not to say *know* him, but I heard a great deal about him from my friends, the Woodwards, of Priory Bank. Did you know the Woodwards?"

"Oh, yes, very well, indeed. Mr. Woodward, senior, was my father's circuit steward," and Allan felt that the world was much smaller than he imagined it, after all.

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"Mr. Jepson," explained Edith, "has come to reside here in Rushington."

"Oh, indeed! Then we shall have you coming occasionally to some of our meetings at the Historic Hall?"

"All in good time, Sister, all in good time," said Mr. Calvert, "though you must not expect him to join you. He belongs to us, you know, and you have plenty of workers in connection with the Mission. Pray, do permit us to keep a few to help on circuit work."

"Mr. Jepson does not look like one whom I could steal," and Sister Marion laughed good-humouredly. "But there, I am not thinking of any such thing, and I hope he may be a great help to you in your work, Mr. Calvert. . . . Still," turning to Allan, "if you would care to——" She did not finish the sentence, for Edith playfully put her hand over Sister Marion's mouth, and that set them all laughing merrily.

But, when the Sister was gone, Mr. Calvert returned to the subject.

"Of course, Allan, you must see the Mission," he said. "It is the one thing in Rushington that everybody goes to see, and people from all parts of the country make special journeys here for the set purpose of seeing it. And it is worth seeing—it is really wonderful, wonderful. It is the finest thing in Methodism. . . . indeed, so far as I know, it is the finest thing of its kind in the whole world. . . . You have heard of it, of course?"

Allan said that he had heard something, but not much. What little he had heard was from his father, whose position in the ministry made him cognisant of most things

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happening in Methodism. But he had heard more about the great London Mission, and the London Missioners had lately been in the Crosstrees Circuit holding great meetings on the Mission's behalf.

"Yes, that, too, is a mighty work," said Mr. Calvert, "but this in Rushington is mightier. . . . Well, perhaps, I ought not to say mightier, but one is apt to be more impressed with things near at hand than things afar off. The Mission here, however, is not only a great spiritual movement for getting people soundly converted to God, but also a great social movement for the uplifting of the fallen. Mr. Rosson is working on the right lines here, and, in my opinion, as well as in the opinion of many others, he is the greatest organiser of religious, philanthropic, and social work on the face of the earth. . . . Oh! I know what I am saying," continued Mr. Calvert, observing Allan's look of amazement, "and I know it is a big statement to make, but it is my deliberate opinion. Of all the men in our ministry, Mr. Rosson has grasped the great truth that the surest way to men's hearts is through their stomachs. Say what men will, it is useless getting poor, starving, thieving wretches converted in our revivals if they are then left to steal the next meal, and——"

"But the London Mission is largely——"

"Largely to the classes," said Mr. Calvert, "at least the better known section of it. But here the Mission is to the masses pure and simple, the common people whom the Lord loved so well; the fallen, the degraded, the ne'er-do-wells who have sunken lower and lower through

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misfortune. . . . God knows the classes need the Gospel quite as much as the masses, and I am not without hope that the dream of the London Missioners will one day be realised, and that we shall see the classes captured by the Gospel and crowd into our Mission Halls there. Why not? Why should not a duke, a marquis, or an earl find his way to the penitent form?—enquiry-room, I believe, is the modern word. Should there be anything remarkable in that? I grant you that the classes are difficult to reach, encased, as they are, in hide-bound conventionalism; but, Allan, the Gospel can do it, and I have faith in it."

At that Mrs. Calvert called them to supper, and the conversation came to a close by the minister saying emphatically, "But you must see the Mission here for yourself, Allan, you really must. There is nothing like it on earth."

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V

THE GREAT MANAGING DIRECTOR

MR. WATSON came back from London towards the end of the week, but it was not until the week after that Allan so much as caught sight of him. That the great Managing Director had returned everyone in the vast building knew full well, for the pressure of his hand was felt upon every department and the strain was almost unbearable. All day long the great man sat in his private office transacting the business of the company, sending out countless messages to every part of the building, ringing up one here and one there on the telephone, receiving reports from the heads of the various departments, dealing daily with a huge mass of correspondence, and discussing matters of business with scores of callers.

The clerks were all busy with their work in the counting-house, when suddenly a bell rang.

"Mr. Watson's bell," exclaimed Charlie Fairclough. "You answer it, Jepson."

Allan hesitated.

"Go and see what he wants," urged Charlie. Evidently Charlie had no wish to answer the bell himself, and there seemed a general feeling of disinclination on the part of the others to enter the Director's room.

"Go on, Jepson, go on," still urged Fairclough.

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Before Allan could make up his mind what to do the bell rang again, struck apparently by an impatient hand this time.

Mr. Hughes came out of his room.

"Do none of you hear that bell?—Oh, you are going, Mr. Jepson? Well, hurry along or Mr. Watson will grow furious."

Allan entered the great man's room with a strange trembling. He did not know why. He had never yet been afraid of any man living and there was no reason why he should now be afraid of Mr. Watson. But, somehow, this feeling in regard to the Managing Director pervaded the whole building and Allan had caught the infection.

"Just ring me up Howarths of Water Street—4324," said the Director without turning his head or looking up from his writing.

"Central!" called Allan, "0713 on 4324." Then he waited a moment, but getting no reply, asked, "Central! Are we on 4324? Engaged?"

He turned towards the Director with the answer. "They are engaged, sir," he said.

The great man swung round in his chair and looked up.

"Oh, never mind then. . . . But who are you? I don't know your face."

"My name is Jepson, sir."

"Jepson?—Jepson? How long have you been here?"

"I came last week. You know my father, I think, sir."

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"Your father? Who is your father? What is he?"

"A Methodist minister."

Mr. Watson thought a moment. "Oh, yes, oh, yes, the Reverend—Reverend——"

"Cephas Jepson," prompted Allan.

"To be sure. I remember now. I think I have met him once or twice. He travelled in Pontypool?"

"Yes."

"And where is he now?"

"In the Crosstrees Circuit."

"And where is that?"

"In Monmouthshire."

"To be sure. I remember all about it now. Sir George Entwistle wrote to me about you. . . . Well, how do you like being here? You will find it a change from country life?"

Allan said that he did.

"A change in every way," said the Director, "and if you don't make the best of it you will only have yourself to blame. You have got a chance in a life-time in coming here, and you can make of it what you will. . . . I have no doubt you will be industrious, but that of itself will do nothing for you. There are hundreds of men employed in this building and they are all industrious; indeed, they must be, or they would get their marching orders,—quick. But a great deal more than industry is needed now-a-days in business life."

The Director paused and surveyed Allan a moment or two through his gold-rimmed pince-nez, and then went on again.

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"I am quite sure that you will be punctual, reliable, and careful in the performance of your duties, but so is everyone else here, and these things will give you no advantage over others. If you mean to go to the front here, you must have capacity; you must *see* things and *dream* things and dare to carry them into effect. If you do not you will find it here as everywhere else, you will be fired out. In other words you will be dispensed with, or, at the best, you will be kept to the drudgery of uninteresting and unremunerative labour. Do you understand?"

It came to Allan as a great shock; but he understood. In the business life upon which he had now entered there were to be no friendly rivalries as at Kingswood when the boys contended for the prizes, but there was to be a fierce and unremitting competition in which few friends and many enemies would be made, and in which the weak would be ruthlessly thrust aside to make room for the strong and successful. Yes, Allan understood and his blood chillled at the thought.

"Take my own case," said Mr. Watson, putting down his pen and crossing his legs, "I came here forty years ago, yes, just forty years ago. Forty years ago I came here as an errand boy, and see what I am now! Forty years ago I was a slum boy—oh, no, I am not ashamed to own it—and now I am the sole managing director of this vast business concern. . . . I remember well coming here. I was just thirteen years of age, and, passing this place one day, I had the—I was going to say the cheek; well, we will say cheek for, after all, that is the

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word that best describes push; I had the cheek, I say, to walk into this building and ask for a situation. Fortunately for me they were just in want of a boy here, and, though I was only poorly clad, I was engaged at once, and here I have been ever since. . . . But what chance had I to succeed? Just the same as you now have; indeed, not so good a chance, for I was only an errand boy. But I made the best of it. In ten years I was head of the counting house, and, before I was thirty years of age, I was a director, and now the whole care of this vast establishment is practically on my shoulders alone."

Once again he paused and looked at Allan as though he would see what impression his words had made on him. Then he went on again.

"I have told you all this. See, what is your name again?"

"Jepson," answered Allan.

"Jepson; of course, Jepson, I have told you all this, I was about to say, in no spirit of boasting, mark you, but just to let you see the opportunities that are here for advancement for the man that will make the right use of them. That is all . . . . and that is all I have got to say to you. On these topics we shall never speak again together. You see the possibilities that are before you, and now you must stand or fall on your own merits."

Allan was turning away when Mr. Watson stayed him with a wave of his hand.

"Oh! how *is* your father?" he asked.

For a moment Allan took this as a softening of the great man's nature and replied that his father was well.

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"Does he like his circuit?"

"Yes, thank you."

"That is a good thing. Good-morning," and, with a strange mingling of feeling stirring his heart, Allan went back to his work in the counting-house.

At the café that noon Charlie Fairclough asked Allan what he thought of Mr. Watson.

"He is a warm member, isn't he?"

"In what way?" asked Allan, scarcely understanding the drift of Fairclough's question.

Fairclough winked at Daggers and laughed.

"Didn't he tell you his history?" laughed Daggers.

Allan looked puzzled.

"Wasn't it, 'See what I have done! Think of me, once a miserable pauper subsisting on a penny bun a day, and then think of me as I am now'?" and Daggers mimicked both the tone and gesture of the Director.

Allan could not help laughing.

"Confess," said Fairclough, "wasn't it so?"

"Not exactly,"—Allan was beginning when Fairclough again interrupted him.

"It amounted to that?"

"Well, yes, probably——"

"Of course it did," said Fairclough with an expression of impatience. "He is so everlastingly boasting about what he has done that one sickens of hearing it."

Hugh Bottomley was knitting his brows and fidgetting in his seat. Mr. Watson was Hugh's model, his ideal toward which he was reaching, and it chafed his soul to

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hear him ill-spoken of. At last he could stand it no longer.

"Some other people would boast, too," he said with irony, "if they had done a hundredth part as well as Mr. Watson has done."

"Who, for instance?" said Fairclough, cocking his eye.

"You would yourself."

"If I had succeeded so well, what need of boasting?" asked Fairclough cogently.

"Here, you fellows," cried Daggers, "no quarrelling, if you please."

"What say you, Freddie Walters?" asked Fairclough, ignoring the good-humoured remark of Daggers.

"Oh, don't ask me," said Freddie, "I want my dinner," at which they all laughed heartily, for they all knew Freddie's opinion without his saying it.

Allan did not know what to think. He went home that evening with strangely conflicting thoughts filling his mind. It was altogether beside the mark, to his thinking, to call Mr. Watson boastful; the principles he had laid down to him that morning in his office were plainly the principles that obtained in business life; and, if he were to succeed, he would have to take them into his reckoning. The question was, Should he or should he not adopt them? Frankly, they were repugnant to him, and seemed cruel and ruthless beyond words. Were there no others? Were there no rewards in business life for honesty and integrity, or had the commercial value of these things ceased to exist? He did not know. He

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could not tell. He did not wish to think of it. Such a thought were treason against all the sacred principles of his upbringing, against eternal God Himself. But he would consult Mr. Calvert. He would talk the whole matter over with the minister when he got home.

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VI

MR. INGERSON

"ALLAN,—Mr. Ingerson, of the firm of Edwin Ingerson & Company. You have doubtless heard the name before?"

With these words Mr. Calvert greeted Allan as he entered the Manse drawing room that evening.

"I have heard you speak of it," said Allan.

Mr. Ingerson rose and extended his hand.

"How are you, Mr. Jepson?" he asked warmly. "It is a real pleasure to meet you after all I have heard about you from my good friend Mr. Calvert."

Allan laughed quietly.

"I am afraid Mr. Calvert does me too great honour in talking of me," he said.

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it," cried Mr. Calvert heartily, "and you will not think so either," turning to Mr. Ingerson, "when you know Allan as well as I do."

"I am quite sure I will not," agreed Mr. Ingerson. "My friend, Mr. Calvert," now addressing Allan, "has a good eye for reading character. He can read a man almost through at a glance, and I can trust to his judgment. I have never yet found him wanting."

"Yet, despite Mr. Calvert's praise," said Allan, "I feel just what I am——"

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"And what is that?"

"A much over-estimated young man."

Mr. Calvert laughed, and Mr. Ingerson, who was one of the heartiest men in the world, slapped Allan on the back good-naturedly.

"A Daniel come to court!" he cried; "why, man alive, your own words justify all Mr. Calvert has been saying about you. Over-estimated! I like you all the better for the word."

Mr. Ingerson was another of Rushington's self-made men. But he was one whom fortune had not spoiled and whose good-nature, generosity, kindliness of heart, and ample goodness had grown and deepened as he had advanced in worldly position and in riches. Born humbly, he had risen by his own industry and goodness to the commanding position he held in the commercial life of the City. When he was a small boy, scarcely in his teens, his father had taken him by the hand to his first situation in the City and he had remained in the same house ever since. Step by step he had risen, like Mr. Watson of the firm of Messrs. Mornington T. Grayson, Blake, & Co., passing from counting-house to salesroom, from a salesman to a buyer, and eventually to admission into partnership with the firm. A few years afterwards, the senior partner having died, Mr. Ingerson became head of the firm, and the business had increased by leaps and bounds ever since. Yet, himself one of the busiest men in Rushington, Mr. Ingerson never appeared to be busy, and was at all times accessible to those who wished to see him upon any matter whatever. Methodical, exact,

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punctilious, he ever seemed to have time upon his hands for any good work, and never allowed his business to absorb him so completely that he had no leisure for other interests in life. Not only in the commercial life of Rushington, but in its social, political, and religious life, Mr. Ingerson's influence was felt. At all public functions in Rushington, he was always a prominent figure; he took a leading part in every philanthropic movement; he was a warm supporter of every effort put forth to purify the city life, and he was in evidence everywhere. And yet, with all this, so free from absorbing thought was his mind and so full of leisure his busy life, that he managed to give almost every Saturday afternoon up to the enjoyment of seeing a football match or cricket match, and he knew the intricacies of the games quite as well as the best on the field.

But Mr. Ingerson's chief work outside his business was in connection with the great Rushington Mission. At one of the Mission's great Halls, situated in the very heart of the slums, Mr. Ingerson could be found almost any night in the week labouring with earnestness and zeal amongst the poor, the fallen, and the criminal, at once the wonder and incentive of all. Yet his well-apportioned house was miles away from Rushington, for, like most of the business men of the city, he deemed it due to himself and his family that they should live away from all the smoke and fog of the city, as far out into the country as possible, where the air was purer and the skies clearer, and where the green fields lay all around them.

This was the man whom Allan Jepson now met for the

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first time. As Allan had said, he had heard something about Mr. Ingerson from Mr. Calvert, but all he had heard had not impressed him as the man himself. Somehow there was an irresistible "something" about the man, a something which Allan could not define, which appealed instantly and strangely to him. His cheeriness of disposition was infectious, and Allan, under its influence, felt himself shaking off the cold cynicism with which he had been poisoned earlier in the day, while the transparency of Mr. Ingerson's character seemed most delightful of all.

"And how do you like Rushington?" Mr. Ingerson asked Allan.

"Fairly well."

"Only fairly well!" and Mr. Ingerson raised his brows in surprise.

Allan looked confused, but attempted to pass it off with a laugh.

"There is no place in the world like Rushington for getting on," said Mr. Ingerson.

"Nor for money-making," said Allan, and there was a noticeable bitterness in his tone.

"Yes, and for money-making," agreed Mr. Ingerson frankly.

"So everyone tells me," said Allan.

"And it is true. . . . though, to my thinking, that is the least and unworthiest consideration of all. You must not make money-making your chief end. The narrowing lust of gold has ruined thousands and thousands."

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"That is what my father told me," thought Allan, but said nothing in reply.

"Ruined thousands and thousands," repeated Mr. Ingerson, "ruined them body and soul. The greatest curse of this age is this money-grabbing spirit. . . . I know what I am talking about. Mr. Calvert here would doubtless say that the greatest curse is intemperance, but nothing of the kind. There is hope for the most abject drunkard living. Go to that man in his times of sober reason and you will find that he has a heart that can be touched; you will find that he heartily abhors himself for his drunken folly, and that he constantly reproaches himself for his weakness. But a money-grabber!—a money-grabber has no heart. He is callous, cruel, unscrupulous, ruthless, and you cannot touch him by any word of reason or any feeling of sentiment."

"But have you not," asked Allan, "in those very words exactly described the character that one should assume in order to succeed in business life?"

Mr. Ingerson turned on Allan a look of amazement, and the minister peered through his spectacles at Allan in blank astonishment.

"What do you mean, my friend?" asked Mr. Ingerson.

Allan's heart warmed towards him. Why should he not tell Mr. Ingerson all that was in his heart? Perhaps, after all, he had got a wrong view of business life and he was judging it by its lowest and meanest standards. The principles Mr. Watson had laid down, and which he had heard reiterated by others, particularly by Hugh Bottomley, were surely not universally accepted?

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"Just this," he answered, and made a clean breast of all that had happened that day.

Mr. Ingerson heard him patiently to the end and then said with surprising vehemence:

"It is not true, friend Jepson; it is not true. Mark, I do not say that these principles do not largely obtain in business life here in Rushington, and I regret to admit it, but what I do say to you, and very earnestly and emphatically, is that they are not necessary to success. . . . Yes, there are a score of men in this city who have climbed to the top by those very means that you have mentioned, but everyone knows them, and there is not one of them respected or esteemed. And, a fig," snapping his fingers, "for their success if it has been gained by ruthlessly trampling down others.

"The most hateful part of this kind of talk," he went on, turning to the minister, "is that it fills all the young fellows' heads who are starting business life with the idea that the chief end they must aim at is to be master; and there is nothing that cripples faithful service so much as that feeling . . . Good gracious! everyone hasn't five talents, or even two; how then can such talentless people become masters? Believe me, by far the greater number of people in this world are people with just one talent, and what is needed more than anything else is that these people should not be deceived into thinking they have more than one. And," turning again to Allan, "take my word for it, the thing that is needed to-day in our business-houses is not extraordinary gifts nor unusual powers of body, or faculties of mind, but trustworthiness,

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thorough, absolute trustworthiness. . . . conscientiousness and Christian character."

Allan listened with delight. Plainly he had seen and heard only one side of the question, and that the unworthy side. Plainly, too, the old principles which his father had taught him were still sought after and appreciated. His heart felt lighter at that moment than it had done for many a day. He could have cried out with pure delight. But, just then, the marble clock on the mantelshelf chimed the hour, and Mr. Ingerson sprang to his feet.

"I must be off," he said, "I have my class to meet to-night at the Hall. What do you say to coming along with me, my friend?" placing his hand on Allan's shoulder. "It would do you good to meet with us, and put a bit of heart into you for the morrow's work."

Allan said that he would have gladly gone but that he wanted to write home, and also that he had promised to read Livy with Edith that night. But he would be glad to go some other day.

"All right, my friend," said Mr. Ingerson, "you write your letter. Keep father and mother at home informed of all your doings here. . . . But, in reference to what we have been talking about, don't be led aside from your father's teachings and from your father's God by anything whatsoever, whoever urges it or whatever the inducements, . . . and, remember, He that is faithful in that which is least is also faithful in that which is much.' And. . . . if you ever feel your need of a friend

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here in the trying life of Rushington, come to me, come to me."

Allan's heart bounded with thankfulness. He had found a friend. All business men in Rushington were not so callous and cruel as he had been led to believe. Mr. Ingerson had come into his life to prove the opposite and as a saviour from the cynicism which was enthralling him. He wrote his letter home to his people with a ready pen and a light heart, and then spent the evening in surprising Edith with his facility at translating Livy into good, idiomatic English.

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VII

DISTURBING REFLECTIONS

HUGH BOTTOMLEY'S chance had come. As a salesman in the flowers and feathers department he had for months outsold all his fellows and the buyer had learned to look upon him as his right-hand man. More than once the buyer had reported Hugh's extraordinary success to Mr. Watson, and the Director had shown his satisfaction by increasing Hugh's salary. But the buyer wanted something more. A young fellow of Hugh Bottomley's abilities, he said, should be on the road; and, given a fairly wide district, he felt sure that he would increase the business of the department four-fold. So Hugh Bottomley got his chance.

"My foot is on the third rung of the ladder now," he said with pardonable pride that day to his companions, "and one day it will be on the top."

"And whose will be at the bottom?" suddenly asked Freddie Walters, with flashing eyes.

They all stared at Freddie in astonishment. It was well known that there was never any love lost between Freddie and Hugh Bottomley, but it was seldom that Freddie allowed himself to show his aversion in this manner.

"Whose will be at the bottom?" he repeated, with almost savage emphasis now.

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Hugh Bottomley looked at him a moment or two in cold contempt, and then said scathingly, "Yours, for one."

"Aye, and many others who have refused to sell their souls to the Devil."

Hugh Bottomley sprang to his feet in anger, but Charlie Fairclough pulled him down into his seat again.

"Now, Freddie," said Charlie authoritatively, "let us have no more of this unseemly jealously. We are going to drink to Bottomley's success, and you must join us."

"I will do nothing of the kind," said Freddie angrily, "nor will I wish success to any man who snatches an advantage over his fellow-labourers by trickery and duplicity——"

Hugh Bottomley was again on his feet gesticulating madly, but held back from committing personal violence on Freddie by Fairclough and Daggers.

"By trickery and duplicity," repeated Freddie with emphasis.

"Such as—what?" coolly demanded Fairclough.

"Such as palming off on customers last season's goods as the present season's, and——"

But Freddie's further anathemas were drowned in loud laughter from the others in which Bottomley's roar was loudest of all.

"Why, man," said Fairclough, "that is nothing but business. You must be a Johnny Greenhorn to think differently."

Since the meeting with Mr. Ingerson, Allan had been

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working with a better heart, but this drove him back into the doldrums again. After all the principles which obtained in the commercial life of Rushington were not those homely ones insisted upon by Mr. Ingerson. That good man had spoken only for himself and of the things that ought to be, but it was plain even to those who shrank from acknowledging it that the chief thing desired in Rushington business houses was not simple goodness and faithfulness merely, but success at all hazards, and that the fickle will-o'-th'-wisp should be pursued whether with or without principles.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind another thing troubled Allan at this time, and that was the state of the church as he found it in Rushington. In all his father's circuits he had seen the churches crowded with earnest worshippers, and the men of the place first and foremost in every good work. But in Rushington the churches were almost empty and the men everywhere marked by their absence from church. It was a surprising and painful discovery to him, and he had thought about it almost night and day since coming to the city. On several occasions he had spoken to Mr. Calvert about it, but he, good easy man, had not seemed to feel the gravity of it as Allan did. Perhaps it was because Allan was fresh from a primitive people in the country where religious feeling ran deeper, while Mr. Calvert had grown accustomed to the indifference manifested towards the churches by the vast majority of people in the towns. A hundred people in the body of a great chapel that had been built to accommodate a thousand was to Mr. Calvert

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a "respectable congregation" while two hundred and fifty or thereabouts was magnificent.

"But why do so *few* men attend the churches?" Allan would persist. "The congregations here are chiefly composed of women; why is that?"

"It is easily accounted for," Mr. Calvert would reply. "Men who work from early morning to late at night in the great warehouses of the city and from the beginning to the end of the week, seek rest and quiet at home on the Sabbath . . . And, for my part, I cannot blame them. The rush and drive of commercial life are such that those engaged in it must have some relaxation."

And at that Allan would say no more. For it seemed to him that, if such an estimable minister as Mr. Calvert were satisfied, it was not for him to advance another word of criticism.

But Mr. Calvert's good-natured tolerance by no means relieved Allan's mind. It rather deepened his concern and weighted his trouble. Probably there was some truth in Mr. Calvert's contention, but the vast crowds of pleasure seekers which Allan met every Sunday driving or wheeling out into the country proved that at least rest and quiet were not the chief things sought after the week's toil. He went the round of the churches, to see for himself if the thing of which he complained were general, and ended his peregrinations by the sad reflection that religion was only an *et cetera* in the life of Rushington.

It was an awful discovery to him, and, for the first time in his life, the citadel of his own simple faith was

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shaken. Had these clear-headed business men of Rushington outgrown the idea of a religion which only obtained in primitive life? He put it to several of his acquaintances; for the most part, they denied it, but they denied it in a way so half-hearted that Allan's convictions were deepened.

He next put it to several of the fellows at the office, and they denied it also, but in a good-humoured fashion, and with so many winks and nods and innuendoes that Allan felt the denial to be only a generous impulse on their part to let him down gently.

Was he then alone in his early beliefs, or, at most, was he but one of a small and diminishing minority of men who still clung to the "fables" taught them in their childhood? For days afterwards life was a blank to Allan. A great void was in his heart and the world was dark and cheerless to him. Had the sun been suddenly struck out of the heavens, the tragedy for him could not have been greater.

Of all this Allan said nothing to his good friends at the Manse. He felt that he could not, and that, indeed, there were some things that were best not said. "Every heart knoweth its own bitterness," he mused, and it was cruel to inflict any portion of it upon others. There were burdens which had to be borne alone, and which no one, however much good-will might be in their hearts, could share. And this was his burden, and his alone.

But some things are revealed without words, and Allan's face, during these days, was a great telltale. He had been blundering through some abstruse mathematical

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problems one night with Edith when she suddenly stopped him with:

"Your mind is not given to it, Allan, or you would not make so many mistakes."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Yes," she said calmly and smiling, "your mind is elsewhere. I have noticed it for the last hour. And that is not all, Allan, it has been the same with you for several nights past. There is something troubling you, Allan?"

Allan tried to evade the question. "Don't be fanciful, Edith," he said, "what can be troubling me?"

"Something of which I know nothing—something, indeed, which you are keeping to yourself. What is it, Allan? Has something gone wrong with you in business?"

"Not anything," he said.

"Then what is it? There *is* something. Is it too secret to tell even me?"

There was a winsomeness in the tone of her voice that at once appealed to Allan's heart. He could resist her no longer. He was helpless in her hands. In a calmer moment he might have hugged his secret to his heart and would not for anything have burdened Edith's gentle mind with his trouble; but just at that moment she appeared to him the one person in all the world who ought to know his secret—the tender soul in whom he could confide. So he told her all that was in his heart.

She heard him to the end without a word. But it was only with a strong effort that she refrained from speak-

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ing. Her heart was full and, at almost every point, she was tempted to interrupt him in his story. Allan was plainly in a pessimistic mood. He had unfortunately lighted upon the worst features only of Rushington life and judged the whole from the part. That much of what he said was terribly true she could not deny, but there was a brighter side.

"I have not found it," said Allan bitterly when Edith put it to him in that way.

"That is because you have not looked for it, Allan," Edith replied, "Generally speaking, men find just what they seek."

"Oh, you wrong me there, Edith. I have indeed looked for better things——"

"How?"

"In vain."

"Shall I help you to look?"

"Help me to look!" cried Allan in astonishment, "What more can you do, Edith, than I have already done?"

"I can show you where to find a different state of things altogether from the ones on which you have unhappily lighted."

"What! here in Rushington?"

"Yes, here in Rushington."

"Can you show me where to find men really in earnest about religion?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Do not misunderstand me, Edith. Of the men in the ministry I am not now speaking. Many of them, almost

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all of them, indeed, are whole-hearted and sincere, but the dry rot of worldliness is eating away the religious instinct of the people. Men have ceased to believe in religion, in heaven, and in God. . . . Oh, I know what I am saying. Scores here openly avow their disbelief, while the masses of the people neglect the churches and treat religion with indifference and contempt."

"Yet," replied Edith quietly, "there are hundreds and thousands of men, even in Rushington, deeply earnest about religion."

"And you can show me them, you say?"

"I can."

"And you will?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Next Sunday, if it suits you."

Allan gazed at her a moment in astonishment.

"You have been everywhere, Allan, except to the right places. There are half a dozen great halls in this very city which are crowded every Sabbath, literally crowded, with earnest religionists——"

"You mean the halls in connection with the great Mission here?"

"Yes."

"I have not been to these."

"No, Allan, you have not thought it worth your while."

"They are not churches."

"What are they, then? . . . But what does it matter what they are, or by what name they are called, so long as they get the people?"

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"But what draws the crowds?" asked Allan, in a tone of querulous criticism.

Edith looked at him reproachfully.

"Brass bands, flaring posters, unhealthy excitements; in a word, the sensational character of the services."

"You shall judge for yourself," said Edith, with a pained expression of countenance that made Allan wince. "Next Sunday we will go together to the Historic Hall, and, meanwhile, I will arrange with Sister Marion for platform seats."

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VIII

AN EVENING SERVICE AT THE HISTORIC HALL

IT wanted more than half an hour to the opening of the service at the Historic Hall when Edith and Allan arrived at that vast building, but it was already half-filled with people, and others were streaming in through every door. "We must go early," Edith had said, "so that we may watch the people come in," but she had not dreamt that it would begin to fill so early.

Sister Marion met them at one of the entrances and conducted them to their seats on the platform.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, addressing Allan; "you will enjoy the service, I am sure."

"How many people will this hall seat?" asked Allan.

"About seven thousand. But we invariably get more than that number present. You will see presently. Every seat and every inch of standing room will be occupied."

Allan drew in his breath in a low long-drawn whistle.

"But that is not all," said Sister Marion. "The Theatre Royal across the way, which we use on Sunday evenings for an overflow service, and which holds about three thousand people, will also be filled in every part, while all the halls of the Mission in this city, some of them the

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biggest buildings in Rushington, will also be crowded to excess."

Allan was amazed, and frankly said so.

"So you see," smiled Sister Marion, "our Mission reaches a vast number of people every Sunday, probably not less than 20,000 at the evening services alone."

"Who is to be the preacher to-night?" asked Allan.

"Oh, Mr. Rosson. He generally takes the evening service himself. Sometimes he gets a stranger in by way of a change, but he considers this to be *his* work, and the people prefer him to any other, be he who he may."

With that Sister Marion had to leave them a while to attend to her duties, and Edith and Allan sat watching the animating scene before them.

The body of the hall and the galleries were almost filled, and still the people streamed in. They came in eagerly and anxiously, as if fearful of losing a seat. Allan whispered to Edith that he had seen nothing like it except once in Bristol at a great political meeting, when Mr. Gladstone was advertised to speak. The hum, the bustle, the hardly suppressed excitement, and the expectancy that pervaded the place got on Allan's nerves. He began to catch the infection.

"Look at the Sisters," said Edith, "moving about from place to place amongst the people. They know many of the customary worshippers here, and it is hardly possible that any stranger can escape their attention. They have a cheery word for everyone they speak to, and all are made welcome."

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"It is magnificent—magnificent!" gasped Allan.

"But here comes Mr. Rosson!"

"Which?" for several ministers and gentlemen were just then coming on the platform.

"Oh, the first."

"A manly-looking fellow," said Allan observing him, "none of your namby-pamby Christians, I should judge."

"He is all he looks," answered Edith, "and more. But listen——"

The hum of voices in the vast building died down and was immediately followed by the rustling of hymn-sheets. Mr. Rosson was standing facing the vast audience.

"We will sing, friends," he said in a clear, sounding voice. "It is our usual custom while the people are coming in, and there is yet a quarter of an hour to the time for opening the service. Number three on the hymn-sheet."

Immediately the great organ began to play, and the string band, ranged with the huge choir in a great gallery of seats right up to the organ loft, accompanied it. Allan's blood took fire. He felt he had never heard anything like it before, and, at a religious service, he certainly never had. But this feeling was surpassed when the people sang the hymn. The effect was simply overpowering, and Allan could no nothing but sit still and listen while his heart surged within his breast and his eyes filled with tears. If people down here on earth sang like that, he thought, what must the singing in Heaven be!

Edith sat watching Allan from the corner of her eyes.

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"Anything sensational about that?" she whispered, when at length the hymn was finished.

"Yes," he answered promptly; "but it is of the right kind."

Edith smiled quietly.

After the singing of one or two more hymns, the service proper opened by a short prayer from the missioner, and then came the announcements.

"There are over seven thousand people here to-night," said Mr. Rosson, "and it is not possible that we should know every face here. The Sisters and myself know a great many of you, but there are doubtless those present to-night who are strangers in this city, and who are in this hall for the first time. They have, perhaps, come up from the country to fight their way here alone, and are without a single friend in this great city of Rushington. . . . Well, we want to be your friends. Will you allow us? . . . Is there any young fellow here to-night oppressed with the loneliness of his life in this city and longing for a friend? If there be one, my brother, I am your friend for Jesus' sake. Pass your name and address up to the platform on a piece of paper, or come into the vestry at the close of this service; or, if you prefer it, see me to-morrow in my office and let me have a chance of welcoming you here and helping to make you feel at home.

"Is there a young girl here to-night, come to service in this big city and feeling her heart desolate and cold as she sits thinking of the old folk at home? You knew everyone in the old home, didn't you? You can see them

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now in their accustomed places in the old sanctuary, and you are wishing you could just steal in amongst them again. You look round upon the great sea of faces here before you to-night, and there is not one you know. You are lonely, you are miserable. My sister, let us have the chance of making you happy. If you will pass up your name or see Sister Marion, or any other of the Sisters after the service, they will see to it that you are not left unbefriended here in this great city.

"No, I am not seeking to proselytise. It does not matter one straw to me to what section of the church you belong so long as you are connected with some church here. Young fellows adrift from the Church of God in this city are likely soon to go wrong, and I want you to act here as you would in the old home in the country. Tell me the church to which you belong and I will introduce you to its minister here. I know all the ministers in this city, and yours will be glad to give you the right hand of fellowship. . . . Remember, your mother would wish you to connect yourself with the people of God."

He paused a moment, and then held up a letter.

"This," he said, "is from a member of the Mission who is now at the front. It is too long to read to you, but you will be glad to know that Private William Jenkins sends greetings. . . . Three years ago, William Jenkins was *not* a member. Many of you know his history, and how he was going headlong to the Devil, till Sister Marion got hold of him. To-day he is a *man*, and as good a soldier of King Emanuel as he is of his country.

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"Now, please look at your hymn-sheets for the announcements for the week. I will read them through, one by one."

Again Edith glanced at Allan. It was on the point of her tongue to ask once more if he found anything sensational in the service, but she felt she could not drive her raillery too far. Besides, Allan's face was flushed and his eyes filmed with tears.

But the wonder of the service to Allan was the sermon. It was so unlike all he had ever heard preached before. It was the living heart of the Gospel. Had Allan been asked to describe it he could not have done it in a word. The missioner's way of putting old truths was unique in Allan's experience, and it was withal pointed, practical, and fervent.

"Well?" asked Edith, as they swept out in the crush from the great building.

"You have proved your statements, Edith," Allan answered simply, for as yet his heart was too full to say more.

"Rushington is not so bad as you thought it?"

"There is a great lump of leaven in it."

"Did you enjoy the service?"

"Thoroughly."

"And you saw nothing objectionable in it?" Edith would not again say the hateful word "sensational."

"No, nothing whatever. On the contrary, everything is just as it should be in a Methodist service. . . . Only——"

"Yes? Only——"

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"Only everything is on a larger scale."

"And more intense?"

"No, I cannot say that. Certainly more intense than I have found the services here, but not more so than the services in the Crosstrees Circuit."

By this time they were out in the street and struggling through the dense crowds of people pouring from the hall.

"The theatres are not in it," someone was saying close to Allan's ear. "The theatres are not in it with Rosson."

"Give him ten years more," another answered, "and the theatres in this city will have to close their doors for want of audiences."

On the outskirts of the crowd an old man was saying to his wife: "In my opinion, my dear, Mr. Rosson is the greatest evangelist on the face of the earth. His coming to Rushington has been the means of turning the place from a veritable Sodom into a clean and wholsesome city—it will be a Paradise before he has finished with it."

Edith touched Allan's arm.

"Did you hear that?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That is a different view from what you have formed of Rushington."

"Totally different."

"And there is a great deal of truth in it."

"I hope so. However, I am satisfied that the Mission is reaching vast numbers of people, and that there are, as you say, thousands of earnest religionists in Rushington. The only criticism I have to offer——"

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Edith put her hand on his mouth playfully.

"Now, don't begin to criticise, Allan. Acknowledge heartily the good that is being done, and thank God for it."

"I do acknowledge it, and no word of criticism shall pass my lips. I am delighted—delighted."

Next day Allan wrote a long letter home to his father, giving a full and glowing account of the service at the Historic Hall.

"I was beginning," he wrote, "to despair altogether for God and religion until I went to this service. Methodism seems a lifeless thing in the churches here, and all the other 'isms' are in the same hopeless condition, while the people of Rushington appear irreligious and cynical. But the service at the Historic Hall has modified my views considerably. There is yet a remnant left, even here in Rushington, who do not bow the knee to Baal or make Gold-getting their one god."

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IX

ALLAN EARNS HIS PROMOTION

A TIME of great commercial prosperity had come to Rushington, and, for the next few months Allan was kept busily at it from early morning to late at night at the office. The clerks, salesmen, warehousemen, and everybody concerned in the vast establishment of Messrs. Mornington T. Grayson, Blake & Company were working at high pressure, and Allan had no time to think of the great things which had been oppressing him. A return of his old feeling to succeed in life, despite all obstacles, had taken possession of him in the great inrush of business, and he had thrown his whole energy into making things "hum," as he said. It was but the meanest drudgery he had to do, yet he did it with a will and a despatch that won him praise from Mr. Hughes. The result of it was that he found himself one bright morning transferred to one of the great departments to fill such a place as had given Hugh Bottomley his chance.

Allan was delighted. At one bound he had gone beyond many older men in the office, including Charlie Fairclough. His heart swelled with pride, and he could hardly contain himself when his friends in the dinner-hour congratulated him on his promotion.

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"You will be head of the firm yet," said Daggers, with cheerful exaggeration. "Old Watson won't have a look in when you get fairly into the swing of it."

They all laughed together at this, and Fairclough said, with just a tinge of bitterness, Allan thought, "When you do climb to those dazzling heights, Jepson, you must not forget us poor beggars slaving at ledgers."

"That I won't," said Allan, in high glee, "you will all get your promotion straightway."

"If we live that long," said Freddie Walters, with sarcasm.

"Hallo; what's up now?" cried Daggers.

"Oh, nothing, only if we are kept at it much longer the way we have been for the past three months we will all be in our graves soon."

A roar of laughter greeted Freddie's words, though Freddie himself did not laugh, or did he intend that his words should be the cause of merriment.

"*You* will never get your promotion," said Daggers, "if you talk such heresy as that."

"I will never get it, heresy or no heresy," answered Freddie, "and I don't want it at the price."

Allan felt his blood run cold. He did not need to ask what was meant by the enigmatical words "at the price," for he knew that Freddie was hinting at the great things which were expected from those who won their promotion, and of the almost impossible fulfilment of these expectations without recourse to methods which could not be more kindly expressed than by calling them "the ways of the world." The others, too, understood

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exactly Freddie's meaning, though Daggers feigned that he did not.

"What price do you want?" he demanded.

"Oh, let it drop," said Fairclough, who never had any wish to follow Freddie into the mysteries of his innuendoes, "What is the price of coal?"

They went up into the smoke-room together and called for coffee. Allan had not been a smoker when he left Crosstrees, but he had learned to manage a cigar since coming to Rushington, "just for the sake of sociability," and he now "stood" cigars all round. He could afford to be generous. He was elated with his success, and his heart was opened largely. It was in his mind to do something to make that day of his promotion memorable. But what to do he scarcely knew.

They were sitting sipping their coffee and watching the curlings of the smoke from their cigars, when Daggers suddenly said:

"There's a fine comedy on just now at the *Criterion*. Seen it, any of you fellows?"

None of them had.

"Haven't seen it myself, though I am told that it is fine—fine."

"Jepson here," said Fairclough, "will treat you."

Daggers wheeled round in his chair and faced Allan.

"Is that a bargain, Jepson?"

Allan laughed. "Can't see where the bargain comes in," he said. "It is a one-sided proposal altogether."

"Can't you?" queried Daggers, cocking his eye.

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"Well, I will enlighten you, young man. You stand 'sam' for me at the *Criterion*—savez-vous?"

"Yes," nodded Allan, laughing.

"That is your part."

"And the other?"

"Well, the other is that I am your obliged friend and servant—twiggez-vous?" and, winking his eye, Daggers sipped his coffee good-humouredly.

"But what about us?" asked Fairclough.

Daggers glanced at Fairclough with open-eyed astonishment.

"Thought you were a sportsman, my boy, and cared nothing for art?"

"Art!" sneered Fairclough, knocking the ash off his cigar into the little Japanese tray.

"Well, for the theatre, then."

"I am not so much gone on it as you are," replied Fairclough, "but, if there is going to be any fun, I want to be in it. Besides, do you think Jepson would want to pay footing to you alone?"

"Oh, don't get excited, young man," said Daggers jocosely; "I'm agreeable. The more the merrier. What say you, Jepson?"

For just one moment Allan hesitated. He had never been to a theatre, though he prided himself that he had no narrow views about such places. All unconsciously to himself, his views had broadened greatly since he came to Rushington. Contact with the world had widened his perspective. Theatres were good or bad, just as those who attended them made them. To the pure, all things

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were pure, and an intelligent, clean-minded man might witness the most outrageous play without carrying away a single degrading impression. Not that he approved of such outrageous plays. His view was that, if properly controlled, the stage could be made a great educative and moral force. He had several times discussed these things with Edith, and she had agreed with him, though, like him, she had never been to the play, that is to a real play in a real theatre. She had, however, taken part with the students of University College in many Shakesperian representations. Edith's father, too, Methodist minister though he was, had hesitated to condemn theatre-going *in toto* on one occasion when he had joined in the conversation, and had confessed to having once seen "a very fine thing" when he was incognito in London. Mr. Calvert did not recommend theatre-going; indeed, the weight of his influence was against it, but once in a way, he thought, a visit to a really good play could do no one any harm.

Yet, for a moment or two, Allan hesitated. His theories were one thing, but putting them into practice was another. Left to himself he would have been contented to let his theories stand as witnesses for his breadth, but just then he was exultant with his success at the office, and anxious to mark it in some memorable way, and Daggers was also gazing into his face for an answer.

"Well, what do you say, Jepson?"

"Oh, I don't mind."

"You will do the proper thing all round?"

"Yes."

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"Said like a gentleman," cried Daggers, seizing Allan's hand and shaking it heartily. "When shall it be? To-night? Nothing like striking while the iron is hot."

"Can't possibly be to-night," said Fairclough, "there is a pile of work at the office to be got through. Say Saturday night?"

"How will Saturday do, Jepson?" asked Daggers.

"It will suit me all right."

"Then it is understood?"

"Yes."

"We shall have a jolly time together," and, drumming on the table with his fingers, while he occasionally blew a puff of smoke from his cigar, Daggers sang merrily in an undertone:

"We won't go home till morning,
We won't go home till morning,
We won't go home till morning,
Till daylight doth appear."

When Allan got home that evening, he found Edith awaiting him in great excitement.

"Shall I guess?" asked Allan, seizing both her hands and holding them in his.

"Yes—if you can." Her face was radiantly happy.

Allan laughed heartily.

"*If* I can!" he exclaimed playfully. "As if it were not written on your face!"

"Well, what is it, Mr. Confident?"

"You have got through your B. A. exam?"

Edith flushed with pleasure.

"Am I right?"

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"Yes."

Allan threw his hat up to the ceiling in glee. "Hurrah!" he cried. "Splendid! splendid! I am delighted."

"I wish you had sat, Allan."

"I wish I had. But how could I? You see how I am kept at it night after night, and. . . . one cannot have it every way."

Edith gave him one swift, glad glance, and then said:

"Shall *I* guess now?"

"Is it written on *my* face?" asked Allan laughing.

"Yes, and in large capitals!"

"Well?"

"You have earned your promotion?"

"Yes."

They were standing in the hall, and the words had reached the ears of the minister sitting in the drawing-room.

"What is that?" he asked, coming forward, book in hand.

"You are as good as a witch, Edith," Allan was saying.

"What did I hear?" Mr. Calvert repeated.

"Allan has earned his promotion," cried Edith, clapping her hands.

Mr. Calvert looked at Allan as if for confirmation of the words.

"Yes, I have earned my promotion," he said; "I have got my foot upon the first rung of the ladder."

"Capital! capital!" cried the minister. "Let me congratulate you, my boy. This is a red-letter day—Edith,

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her B. A., and you your promotion! But let Allan get his things off, Edith, and then he can tell us all about it."

Sister Marion came in while they were felicitating each other.

"What about Saturday, Edith?" she asked, when the usual salutations were over. "Of course, you are coming?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"And Mr. Jepson?"

"I have not yet mentioned it to him. My thoughts have all been taken up with the probable result of my exam, but now that it is over, I shall be really glad to get some little relaxation. . . . The Sisters of the Mission," turning to Allan, "are having their annual Social on Saturday evening, and Sister Marion would like us to be present. Father and mother are going, and, of course, you will go, too?"

Allan's heart sank within him.

"I am afraid," he was beginning when Sister Marion interrupted him.

"Oh, you *must* come, Mr. Jepson. You will thoroughly enjoy it. Our Social is no ordinary affair, you know; is it, Edith?"

"It is not. The most interesting feature about it, Allan, is the number of respectable people present who were nothing but human wrecks twelve months ago."

"All the rescued during the year's work," amplified Sister Marion, "who are within reach will be present—men picked out of the gutters, so to speak, girls gathered

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in from the streets, moral lunatics now clothed and in their right minds. And, of course, besides these there will be many ladies and gentlemen who are friends of the Mission, and who are interested in rescue work."

"In fact," said Edith, "everyone of importance in the religious life of the city."

"I don't know that I am very anxious to meet them," laughed Allan.

"Oh, but you must," insisted Edith.

"Why should you not meet them?" asked Sister Marion, for she fancied she detected a sneer in Allan's words.

"Because—well, because I never have met them," he answered lamely.

"That is no reason why you should not now," replied the Sister.

Mr. Calvert was listening gravely. Something in Allan's manner seemed to suggest to him that a great crisis had come in his young friend's life, and he was trying to ascertain the cause of it.

"Come, Allan," he said, "it may be to your interest to meet these men, quite apart from the pleasure you will get from the gathering. Some of them are merchant princes and big subscribers to the Mission funds."

"The latter being plainly a cardinal virtue," said Allan.

His words struck them dumb for a while, and then, Sister Marion, to relieve the embarrassing situation, asked, with feigned gaiety, "Do you intend that for sarcasm?"

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Allan's face was pallid with its intensity, and his eyes were flashing.

"Sarcasm!" he exclaimed, "it is the literal truth. The men who are held in high esteem in the Christian churches in Rushington are the men whom the world also esteems, the men with the big money-bags, whose names are on all the subscription lists, but who really have no interest whatever in religion, and who treat the churches with contempt.

"I could give you a dozen instances in this city," he went on while they stared at him dumfounded. "There are men here, holding important positions in the church, who rarely darken the church's door, and who atone for all their shortcomings in this respect by big subscriptions. Money, money, money seems the only thing of moment in the religious life of Rushington, as it is in its business life. Oh, I know what I am saying, and you know it, too. . . . Yes, I admit all the good your Mission is doing; it is grand, it is magnificent, and the glory of it will only be known when the day breaks, but it is a Mission to the lower classes mainly——"

"No," said Sister Marion emphatically.

"*Mainly,*" repeated Allan. "There certainly is a sprinkling of the middle class, but the purely business men of Rushington are marked by their absence from your Mission as from the churches, while the upper ten here, the men who have succeeded in life, confine their interest to a patronising attendance at your socials and gala-days, and thumping subscriptions."

To say that Allan's words produced a painful impres-

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sion would be understating it. Edith was shocked, and Sister Marion felt as if she had been smitten on the cheek. The minister, however, was calmer; at least, he was better able to simulate calmness. He realised also that this was not a time to argue with Allan; the time for quiet reasoning would come later. Meanwhile, it was his business to end this conversation by bringing it back to the starting-point. So, "Still for all that," he said, "you will give us the pleasure of your company with us at the Social on Saturday?"

"I am sorry to say that I cannot," answered Allan.

"Cannot!" exclaimed Edith, and, turning to her, Allan caught the reproach in her eyes full in his face. He coloured deeply and stood for a moment confused.

"Of course, he will come, father," said Edith, thinking that she saw surrender in Allan's looks.

For a moment there was silence, and then Allan said:

"To please you, Edith, I would gladly—I would sink all my own personal feeling in this matter, but the fact is, I have promised some of the fellows at the office to go elsewhere on Saturday night, and I cannot very well get out of it."

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X

THE MASTER PASSION

TWO hearts were smarting that night, Edith's with the pain of Allan's refusal to accompany her to the Social, and Allan's with the pain of refusing. And, strange to say, two hearts realised for the first time that night how very much the one was to the other and how little happiness there was for the one apart from the other. Up to that night, Edith and Allan had been boon companions, that was all; but now that great mystery which springs up between two human souls, which men call Love, revealed itself to each of them, and Life instantly took on a richer and a larger meaning for both.

Edith was glad to get to her bedroom to think of it alone, and Allan, in his bedroom, divided only from Edith's by a wall, was revelling in his discovery.

"If he only knew," Edith was saying to herself, while he, on the other side of the wall, was saying to himself, "I am in love, in love, in love with the purest and best girl that ever breathed."

Edith was genuinely alarmed at her discovery; Allan was in ecstasies over his.

"How I shall hide my feelings," Edith was wondering, "I don't know. It would be terrible to betray my-

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self"; and Allan was cogitating how he might best disclose his to Edith, and tell her all that was in his heart.

Edith began to think of how it had all come about. She had never dreamed of such a thing happening. Certainly it had not been love at first sight. She had grown into it, and she could not help feeling that hers was the love that was most likely to endure,—a love that was not founded on a whim or a fancy, but which had grown out of an intimate friendship. And, now that she reflected upon it, she was conscious of a deep interest in Allan from the first moment she set eyes upon him, and that interest had been deepened and fostered from their love of books. And was that all? Certainly, Allan was handsome, far more so than other young fellows of her acquaintance; at least, *she* thought him so. He was intensely in earnest about religious matters; he was frank, sincere, and transparent; and he was withal so courteous, considerate, and charming in his manner that, without scarcely realising it, she had set him up in her heart as her ideal knight; so that now the revelation that had come to her was scarcely the mystery it appeared at first blush. But that it should have come so quietly and suddenly! That it should have come with his refusal to accompany her to the Social! When he and she were translating Livy and puzzling over abstruse questions in physics together, she had no idea that her heart was quietly solving another and a greater problem. Had she known it——

She was suddenly interrupted in her musings. There was a moving about in the next room. It was Allan.

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Why was he not in bed long ago? Was he ill that he was moving about at that hour? She listened breathlessly. It sounded as if Allan were pacing his room to and fro. He surely must indeed be ill. How she longed that she might go to him to ask him why he did not sleep, to tend and to comfort him! She felt as if the room could not contain her.

Presently the sound of the pacing ceased, and then shame filled Edith's heart. How foolish she was to sit there dreaming of a love that would never be reciprocated! Allan did not love her, that was plain from his treatment of her that night. At least, she qualified it, he did not love her as she loved him. Had he done so nothing would have kept him from accompanying her to the Sisters' Social. But he preferred the company of others; he preferred "the fellows" at the office, as he called them. Who were these precious fellows that they should come before her in his affections? Whoever they were, so long as they did come before her, Allan might consort with them to his heart's content so far as she was concerned. She could never love a man who slighted her as Allan Jepson had done that night. And, having come to this bitter conclusion, she rose to her feet impulsively, let down the long, dark tresses of her hair, and prepared for bed.

But she did not sleep. For hours she lay tossing about and going all over the *pros* and *cons* for love again and again. One thing she resolved upon. She would hide her feelings towards Allan. When she met him in the morning she would meet him as if nothing had happened

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on the night before. She would be her old self, not her new self. Neither by hint, look, nor word, would she allow him to see into her heart.

Yet how she would accomplish it she did not know. In spite of all her feeling of resentment against Allan for the slight he had offered her, and in spite of her purpose to play the part she had planned, somehow she was strangely conscious of a wavering in her resolution. And, if this were the state of her mind in Allan's absence, what might it be in his presence, when he stood face to face with her and eye to eye? For, when all was said and done, she had to confess that she really loved Allan, and that it would only be by the strongest self-control that she would be able to keep her secret from leaping out. She almost wished now that Allan was not her father's guest. She wished that her father had allowed him to find his own lodging. Again and again Allan had pleaded that it was best for him and them that he should make his home elsewhere, but her father had always met him with, "Tired of us at last, Allan?" The truth was, her father did not want Allan to leave the home. He had learned to love Allan as his own son, and it would be to him like sundering the family to part with Allan now. Yet for her it would be simply terrible to continue living under the same roof as Allan with this bubbling secret in her breast. It must break forth and reveal itself. Such was its character that she was convinced it could not long be hid. She felt she did not know what to do.

Meanwhile, Allan, too, lay awake and tossing in bed. The discovery that he was in love with Edith had also

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filled his heart with remorse at having pained her by his refusal to go with her to the Social. He wished now that he had not promised the fellows at the office to go to the theatre. After all he had no desire to go and no love for the theatre. He was not going because he looked forward to enjoying the play, but simply because he had foolishly got it into his head that it was incumbent on him to do something to mark his promotion at the office. The vanity, the stupidity of it! Far better, he thought, would it have been for him to have marked his promotion by going to the House of God. And of all places for him, a Methodist minister's son, to go to, the theatre was, perhaps, the worst! It certainly was the worst looked at from a purely Methodist point of view. Of course he was not so narrow-minded as the old Methodists, or as his own father even, but he could not help feeling that he had not chosen the best method for marking his promotion. He sincerely hoped that Edith would not hear of it. She was broad-minded on the question of theatre-going, he knew, but, well, it was perhaps best to keep this thing to himself. Of course he would have to go now. The fellows at the office would never forgive him if he drew back. But it would be his first and last visit to the play.

But what of his newly-discovered love for Edith? He could not hide that; he would not try to hide it. He would make it known to her at the first opportunity. And, having come to this sensible conclusion, he turned over on to his side and fell asleep.

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XI

AT THE PLAY

THE *Criterion* was crowded in every part that Saturday night. Allan and his guests occupied seats in the dress circle and amused themselves in the interval before the lifting of the curtain by examining the faces of the people, in the various parts of the building, through opera glasses.

"Quite a respectable company here," said Daggers enthusiastically. "Some big bugs, too, yonder in the boxes."

"It appears a gay company," said Allan.

"Some colour about it," agreed Daggers. "Fashionable folks no doubt—many of them over there."

"I was not referring to the dress, but to the character of the people here," said Allan.

"Good-humoured? Yes, you bet."

"Yes, good-humoured apparently, but I used the word gay in a wider sense."

"Fond of fun and full of life? You bet. You are just in the place to find that class of people. No long, sanctimonious faces here. The people who come here are those who get the best out of life and the greatest enjoyment. Right reverend seigniors, some of them, in their daily walk of life, and shrewd, hard-headed business men,

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but they know how to throw their graver things to the winds once they come in here and give themselves up to pure enjoyment. . . . Gad! that's a duchess and nothing less, coming in yonder to the opposite boxes. See? Look at the style with her and her carriage! Have you the glasses, Fairclough? Who is the gentleman with her? Do you know him?"

Fairclough was quietly but intently examining the said duchess and dropping *sotto voce* exclamations meanwhile.

"She's a regular high-flyer. . . . Painted, though, and done up to the nines. . . . She is turning now for the gentleman to take her cloak off. . . . By Jupiter! it's—Guess?"

"Who?" panted Daggers.

"Watson."

"Who?" repeated Allan incredulously.

"The boss—Watson."

"Never!" exclaimed Allan.

"It is, though. Look for yourself," and Fairclough handed Allan the glasses.

"And so that is the old girl, then!" mused Daggers. "My eye! what a dash she cuts."

"After you, Allan," said Freddie Walters, and Allan passed him the glasses. His face was white and set, and there was a strange look in his eyes.

"Why, what is the matter, old chap?" asked Fairclough, observing him.

"Oh, nothing, nothing."

"Does it surprise you to see Mr. Watson here?

"Yes, it does,—rather."

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"I am jolly glad to see him here," said Daggers. "It shows that the boss has got more heart in him than we thought. It will be interesting to watch how he enjoys the comedy. Some of these chaps who are regular old screws during the day-time, and as hard as nails, are as merry as school-boys at night-time."

"I always thought old Watson a bit of a character," said Fairclough. "Just fancy him coming here to witness a comedy."

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded Daggers.

"Oh, I know no reason why he shouldn't," answered Fairclough indifferently, "only——"

"Only—what?" persisted Daggers.

Fairclough hesitated, and almost involuntarily Allan answered.

"Only, that Mr. Watson was expected elsewhere to-night."

They all turned to Allan for some explanation of his words, and he felt himself obliged to give it.

"The fact is," he said, "Mr. Watson is expected at the Sisters' Social at the Mission to-night. It is an annual affair and his name was mentioned to me as one who was expected to be present. It will be a great disappointment to them."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Daggers, shrugging his shoulders, "these church socials are tame affairs. Mr. Watson will be a jolly sight better entertained here than at the Mission Hall."

"At any rate," said Fairclough, "he shows his preference by being here."

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"He does that," sad Daggers, "and his wisdom."

The orchestra began to play. Daggers lay back in his seat and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the music. Fairclough took from his pocket the "Football Edition" of the *Echo* and read the day's results. Freddie Walters sat scanning the faces of the people through the opera glasses, and Allan fell into deep thought.

He was sorry he had come to the theatre. Had Daggers not suggested it the thought would never have occurred to him to celebrate his promotion by coming to the play. He had little interest in such things, and what little he had, had been scattered by the discovery that Mr. Watson was present at the theatre. Mr. Watson's was a big name in the church, and his presence there that night did not appear to Allan in harmony with his exalted position. No, he was not narrow-minded in his thought, but it seemed to him as if almost everything that happened only emphasised the great fact that was becoming clearer to him each day, that Rushington business men cared nothing whatever for religion, and that many of those who practised it only did so from a sense of the demands conventionalism.

At that moment the leader, with a flourish, brought the piece which the orchestra had been playing to an end. Instantly a great buzz of talk arose all over the building, and Daggers grew voluble in praise of the music just played. But Allan scarcely heard him, or, at any rate, scarcely understood. A great heaviness fell upon his spirits, and he could not shake it off. Below him, and on either side of him, the great sea of human faces of

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itself might have afforded him interest, but his thoughts were far away. He was thinking of Edith. At that very moment she was, doubtless, on her way to the Social. She would be thinking of him. She would be wondering where he was and how he was spending the evening. Would she learn the truth? Not if he could keep it from her. But could he keep it? In the theatre that night were probably some who knew both him and Edith. He had not calculated upon that in coming. Of all places in Rushington he least expected to meet those who knew him there. But Mr. Watson's presence shook Allan's confidence in his own incognito; indeed it was almost an assurance to him that others who knew him were also present. This great audience was not what he had thought a theatre-going people to be. All classes of the community seemed to be represented:—up in the galleries a strange medley of people, down there in the pit the comfortably clad artisan and the poorly paid clerk with his sweetheart or wife; in the stalls, the dress circles, and the boxes, the superior and prosperous people of the city. It would be strange indeed if amongst all these there was no one who knew him.

With the close of the next overture, the people began clapping for the performance to start.

"Two minutes yet," said Daggers, consulting his watch.

The clapping grew louder, and someone started the "Kentish fire." Presently a momentary lull came, and then the bell rang.

"Curtain is going up," explained Daggers, and, as it

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was seen ascending, the clapping ceased and a great hush of expectancy fell upon the audience. Suddenly, Allan found himself gazing upon a lovely forest scene through which a stream of girls, dressed as peasants, raced and danced. His interest was aroused at once. He had never seen anything like it. Everything was so natural and so perfectly beautiful. It was a revelation to him. He had been trained to look upon dancing as a devilish art, but the rhythmic, graceful movements of these dancers touched his admiration, and he found himself at the close of the dance clapping as heartily as anyone in the building.

"Pretty, that?" said Daggers, handing Allan the glass.

"Very," Allan agreed.

"Some pretty girls amongst them, too," said Daggers.

That was just what Allan wanted to see, and he at once focussed the glasses upon the dancers. His ideas of actors and actresses had all been gathered from those who had never, or scarcely ever, been inside a theatre, and, as may be imagined, were not of a very exalted order. Now he had an opportunity to judge for himself.

A few moments of glancing through the glasses convinced him of the truth of the remark made by Daggers. There were indeed some pretty girls amongst the dancers. And there appeared to him nothing unmaidenly about them. There was no flaunting of wickedness as he had been led to expect, nothing whatever unbecoming. Some of them appeared innocent and simple maidens with the reserve and shyness about them that might naturally be expected in village maidens. If these were a fair sample

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of actresses, he saw nothing objectionable in them. And, as for the scene he was witnessing, nothing could be prettier. Where then came the offence in theatre-going?

Allan had always prided himself in looking at things from a broad point of view, but he was developing rapidly. From a mere tolerance he was becoming a defender and a supporter of the play.

An old pedlar came on the stage at that moment with his basket of wares, walking by the aid of a long staff, ornamented at the top with vari-coloured ribbons fluttering in the wind. Round his wide, soft hat ribbons were also tied and cards of braid, buttons, and thread were fastened. He was singing lustily a snatch of a popular song as he came. The moment the merry dancers heard him coming they ran and hid behind the trees, and the pedlar, coming presently to a halt, looked about him in admiration.

"A lovely place, a lovely place," he said aloud, and deposited his basket on the greensward. Then he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree with his staff laid across his knees. A moment afterwards he took up his song again, and it went echoing through the wood. But there was more than echo in the repetition of the last line, which, indeed, seemed to be sung by sweet girl-voices.

The pedlar sprang to his feet and looked about him in wonder.

"Hallo-a!" he cried.

"Hallo-a!" promptly came back the answer.

"By my sakes!" he exclaimed, scratching his head, "if this place isn't alive."

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"Isn't alive," came again in response.

The old pedlar scratched his head again and stood puzzled-looking.

"Who are you?" he called presently.

"—are you," came back the answer.

"Who am I?" he answered.

"—am I?" echo replied.

"I am Dick the pedlar."

"Dick the pedlar."

For a few moments he again stood puzzled-looking. Then he burst into loud laughter.

Immediately loud laughter answered him.

"That's no echo!" he cried.

"No echo!" faithfully came the response.

"Show yourselves!"

"Show yourselves!"

"I am here—*here;* come and look at me."

"Come and look at me."

"I'll be hanged if I will," replied the pedlar, now with irritation, and sat himself down on the log again.

"—hanged if I will!" pealed out the echo.

He opened the satchel suspended across his shoulders and took out and ate some luncheon. As he ate, he muttered constantly in anger against the mimicking voices.

Suddenly he found himself encircled by the group of pretty maidens. They laughed at him and plagued him by their words and by the playful stealing of his wares. The fun grew fast and furious. It was delightful. There was nothing wicked in this. If this were a specimen of

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theatre plays, well the strictest Methodist, Allan thought, might see them without being the least shocked,—indeed, no one could see them without feeling the better for it. The heart grew lighter, dull care was chased away, and the mind relaxed.

At the end of the second act there was an interval during which Daggers and Fairclough went down to the bar to get a "mouthful of something." Both begged Allan to accompany them, but he declined.

"No," he said in reply to some banter from Daggers, "I draw the line there, and I should be better pleased if you did the same."

The two went off together laughing gaily and Allan turned to Freddie Walters for a quiet *tête-à-tête*.

A few minutes afterwards, however, someone touched him on the shoulder from behind, and, looking round, Allan saw the beaming face and outstretched hand of a young fellow in evening dress leaning over the back seat. Allan recognised the face at once as that of a young fellow to whom Edith had introduced him at one of the college lectures. This was another whom he had not dreamt of seeing at the theatre, and he felt that his incognito was now gone entirely.

Presently Daggers and Fairclough returned to their seats, and, almost immediately afterwards, the play was resumed.

Daggers grew talkative, and the people in the neighbouring seats cried, "Hush!" Daggers said he would not hush; who were they shouting at? Nevertheless he got up and went out, Fairclough following him. Allan

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felt greatly relieved. But they were not gone long, and, when they returned, Fairclough joined Daggers in disturbing the peace of those around them.

Allan looked at Freddie Walters in helplessness, and Freddie looked back in disgust. A strong smell of spirits pervaded the place in which they were sitting, and Allan's face flushed with shame. He rose from his seat and made for the door, only to be followed by the maudlin questioning of his drunken companions. He was horrified and got out of the theatre as quickly as he could, leaving his companions to the execrations of the angry people sitting near.

When he got home he pleaded a headache, an affliction from which he was truly suffering, and went straight up to his room without supper. And so ended the day, and the celebration of his promotion.

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XII

MR. JEREMIAH WALLWORTH, AND FAMILY

EDITH had retired when Allan got home from the theatre and so he did not see her till the next day. "Mr. Ingerson called for you yesterday," she said as she took her seat opposite Allan at the breakfast table.

Allan, whose manner suggested self-reproach, looked up enquiringly.

"He came here in a hansom."

"What did he want?"

"He thought you would like to go to the cricket match."

Allan's face coloured. "It was very good of him," he said, "but was not Mr. Ingerson expected at the Sisters' Social?"

"Oh, yes, of course," replied Edith, "but that, you know, was not until evening."

"How did you and your friends enjoy yourselves, Allan?" asked the minister after a pause.

Allan was taken aback at the question, but answered as off-handedly as he could, "Oh, all right. . . . How did the Social pass off?"

"Splendidly, splendidly," answered Mr. Calvert.

"Many there?"

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"A great many. It was a delightful gathering and cannot have failed to impress all who were present. . . . By-the-bye, your Mr. Watson did not turn up."

"N—no—o?"

"Had some other engagement," explained the minister.

"But he sent a cheque," said Mrs. Calvert.

"Oh, yes, and a very handsome one, too," said the minister. "He is, as you know, Allan, a very busy man, but he has shown a strong interest in the rescue work of the Mission from its inception."

For a few moments the conversation ceased, and only the rattling of knives and forks was heard. But, in those few moments, a great many thoughts had flitted through Allan's brain. He looked up from his plate and caught Edith scrutinising him closely. She, too, was plainly concerned about something.

"Did Mr. Watson say what his engagement was?" he asked, partly to cover his embarrassment and partly to satisfy his own curiosity.

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Calvert, "but it was doubtless something in relation to business. You can never be sure of such busy men as Mr. Watson—they are liable to be called away at any moment. But you can rely upon their——"

"Their cheque?" suggested Allan.

"Their cheque, yes. But their practical help and sympathy, I was going to say."

Allan smiled. "That *sounds* better," he said, but the minister missed the cynicism in his tone.

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The subject changed.

"Would you care to go with me to chapel, this morning, Allan?" asked the minister.

"Where are you going to preach?"

"At Bridston. You have never been to Bridston? It is nine miles out from Rushington, and a lovely village. A suburban residential place for Rushington merchants. We have a fine chapel there and quite a fashionable congregation. The Walthams, the Howcrofts, the Wallworths, and the Darlingtons all live out there. George Darlington, senior, is a big connexional man and treasurer of I do not know how many of our funds."

Allan glanced at Edith as if to get her consent, seeing which Edith said at once, "I think you would like it, Allan. There are some very nice people out there, and you would enjoy the service, I am sure. They have a magnificent organ at the chapel, and an organist second to none in this district. He is quite an enthusiast and the choir is one of the best trained choirs in Methodism. The service is fully choral——"

"A choral service in Methodism! I never heard of such a thing."

Mr. Calvert smiled quietly, but Edith said Allan had better not pass any opinion on such services until he had joined in one. She was strongly of opinion, however, that he would not only enjoy the service, but benefit in every way by going. He would get a better idea, for instance, of Methodism in Bridston than he could get from the deserted churches in Rushington, and he would see that Methodism was not the dead thing he had been

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imagining it. Indeed, it was to the suburban churches that he must look if he really wanted to see living Methodism—living Methodism apart from the great Mission.

Thus urged, Allan agreed to accompany Mr. Calvert, though he really had little desire to do so. His interest in religious things was passing. A few months before he would have seized upon the opportunity offered him with alacrity; but he had gradually been made to feel that religion was almost a lost art in Rushington, for which people cared little or nothing, and he had no hope of finding anything different in the suburbs.

To get to Bridston they took the train from the Borough Road station.

"An unusual experience to you, Allan, this Sunday travelling? But it is absolutely necessary. We should never get to our appointments if it were not for the trains. . . . Our fathers? Ah yes, I know, I know; they travelled long distances on foot in order to preach to perhaps a hundred people, and I do not know what they would say to us could they come back again and see how things and customs have developed. I confess to having twitchings of conscience myself at times about this Sunday travelling, especially when I see the trains crowded with mere pleasure seekers; but there it is and the work must be done. And, after all, I don't see that God requires a man to wear his body out, and break down his health by travelling impossible distances when a convenient and ready means of transportation is placed at his very door."

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Six months back Allan would have replied vigorously to this speech of Mr. Calvert, but now he said nothing. What did it matter whether he spoke or not? The whole trend of the life in which he lived was against the spirit of Christ's teaching as he understood it. Why then should he speak? What difference would it make if he did? His solitary protest would be like the Voice crying in the wilderness.

The station was thronged with people and others were crowding into it from every part. Allan had never seen it more thronged on the busiest week-day.

"It is not a bit like Sunday," he said to Mr. Calvert, and Mr. Calvert replied by pointing to a train into the carriages of which hundreds of men, with fishing-rods in their hands and baskets slung over their shoulders, were crowding. "That's the kind of thing," he said, "that is making the English Sabbath what it is and destroying its sanctity. There is an angling match somewhere, I suppose, and those men are off to it."

Allan shuddered. "Why cannot they hold their matches on some other day," he asked.

"Well," said Mr. Calvert, after a little hesitation, "Sunday is practically the only holiday in the week many of these men get, and, I suppose, that is the reason. But here is our train, Allan; jump in."

It was a beautiful morning, and despite his feelings, Allan enjoyed the ride through the country to Bridston, where they arrived half an hour before the time fixed for service. As the chapel lay about three-quarters of a mile from the station, Mr. Calvert gave up his idea of calling

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upon the great Mr. George Darlington before the service, as had been his intention, and took Allan by the way of the fields and along the riverside footpath to the chapel.

It was a lovely bit of scenery through which they passed and Allan felt as if he had been suddenly translated from Vanity Fair into Paradise.

The river at Bridston is not wide but, as everyone knows, it is always clear. As the two went sauntering along, they could see fish darting about. Pleasure boats lay moored to the banks, and two house-boats were anchored in mid-stream. These boats were beautifully painted and their windows decorated with pretty blinds and hanging plants, and they added just the bit of colour the landscape needed.

Allan paused to admire them.

"How delightful it would be," he exclaimed, "to spend a holiday week resting in one of these boats!"

"You would like it?"

"I should think so. It would be an ideal holiday."

"Well, perhaps, you will get the chance one day; who knows? The far boat belongs to one of our people."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Mr. Jeremiah Wallworth owns it. He bought it for his children. Children, I call them, but they are all grown up, three young ladies and two young gentlemen. A fine man, Mr. Jeremiah Wallworth."

"Self-made man?"

"Oh, yes, entirely. Began in quite a humble way, and has now one of the largest wholesale houses in Rushington."

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Allan was delighted with the church (the Bridston people did not call it a chapel) both as regards the structure itself and the congregation. As to the former it was a large Gothic building of the most artistic design externally, and with an interior as beautiful as any church Allan had ever seen. The only thing he objected to in its appearance was the position of the pulpit, which was placed on one side of the nave and not in the middle as was common in Methodist chapels. He thought it strange, too, to see sidesmen in black gowns putting people into their seats; but he was particularly pleased with the large and "fashionably dressed" congregation that gathered to the morning service. Even the choral service was in no way displeasing to him, and the singing was all that Edith said it was. His feeling on leaving the church that morning was that he had been misjudging Methodism and that it was not the effete church he had been picturing it.

After the service Allan joined Mr. Calvert in the vestry.

"Well, Allan, what do you think of the chapel?" asked the minister.

"It is very beautiful."

"And the service—the choral service?"

"I think Edith was right in what she said."

"Certainly she was," said Mr. Calvert heartily. "I knew you would like it. . . . Well, I declare," running his finger down the dinner-plan, "we are Mr. Wallworth's guests for the day. Strange, isn't it, after our little talk of this morning? Perhaps you will get a chance

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of seeing the house-boat sooner than you could have hoped."

The stewards came in with the collection boxes and began to count the offertory. A moment afterwards Mr. Jeremiah Wallworth followed them into the vestry and greeted Mr. Calvert most cordially; and then the minister introduced Allan to Mr. Wallworth.

"The Reverend Cephas Jepson's son? One of our minister's sons? I never met Mr. Jepson, though, I fancy, I have seen the name in the Minutes. Well, and how do you like Rushington? Getting to like it better than you did? That is well. Doubtless, you would at first think it a black and smoky place after the country. But there is no city in England like Rushington for young fellows anxious to push their way in the world. . . . With what firm are you? Mornington, Grayson, Blake & Company! Couldn't be better. A Methodist house, too! At least, Watson, the Managing Director, is a Methodist, and that is almost as good. Well, let us get along. We dine early on Sundays, and we must not keep the dinner waiting."

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XIII

THE HOUSEBOAT ON THE RIVER

BRIDSTON is a suburb of red-brick houses built in almost every conceivable style of architecture just as it chanced to suit the whims and oddities of the separate builders. Most of the houses are large and commodious; some of them are very large indeed, little palaces in their way, and fashioned throughout in a manner that would do credit to the luxury of princes. But, for this class of house, Mr. Jeremiah Wallworth cared nothing —and, indeed, if the truth must be told, often sneered at them as inartistic and jerry-built. Nothing that was not fabricated of good building-stone, hewn in the quarries and brought down from the mountains, appeared to him of any worth or beauty whatever; and hence it was that his own house, a large building which stood four-square to the winds of Heaven about half a mile from the village proper, and in its own grounds, was constructed of the best building-stone that could be found in the quarries of Derbyshire. A great wall ran round the house and shut out the grounds, which were of special loveliness, from the view of the vulgar passing by.

As the trio approached the house that morning a sound of merry laughter came from the grounds.

"That's Kit," said Mr. Wallworth proudly, "She is a regular little puss, is Kit."

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With the improvement of his worldly position, Jeremiah Wallworth had not attempted to improve on his naturalness, and, excepting a little veneer that he kept for city use, he was much the same sort of man that he was when he sold fents in a vilely-ventilated cellar in the city.

"Miss Kitty has not been to chapel this morning?" asked Mr. Calvert.

"No, only Mary and Jake were there this morning, and Jake only came to please Mary. He didn't say it, but I know it. Mary is an out-and-out Methodist like her father, but as for Kitty and Nellie and the lads, I don't know what to make of them lately. The girls have taken it into their heads to go to the Establishment; they say they prefer it; and the lads, when Mary is not at home, often go with them. It was a great trouble to me at first, but I have come to the conclusion that it is best to let things take their course, lest any interference on my part should drive them from the House of God altogether."

By this time they were within the grounds of Mr. Wallworth's house and going leisurely up the path to the front entrance. There were great trees on either side of the walk, and it was not until they turned a bend in the path that they came in sight of the great lawn in front of the house. It was from this lawn that Miss Kitty's laughter had reached them in the road, and, to Allan's complete amazement, he now beheld Miss Kitty, with her sister Nellie and a younger brother, engaged in playing lawn-tennis.

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The blood rushed to Allan's face as he saw them. He had "broadened" a good deal since coming to Rushington, but he had not sufficiently broadened to look lightly on the sanctity of the Sabbath. That was still to him God's Day, as inviolate and as sacred as ever it had been in his simple days in the country. That the multitudes in the city heeded it not he had soon discovered, but it was a revelation to him that the children of Methodist parents turned it into a day of play.

But Mr. Wallworth was calling to his children.

"Kit! Nell! Edward!"

The game ceased suddenly, and, the next moment, the girls were at their father's side, kissing him in turn. Edward, a closely-cropped, fiery-headed young fellow, who wore pince-nez, merely turned his head and stood moodily awaiting his father's approach.

"Have you not been to church this morning?" Mr. Wallworth asked his daughters.

"Not this morning, father," answered Miss Kitty. "It was just too lovely to go to church. . . . Oh, I beg pardon, Mr. Calvert," noticing the minister gazing at her.

"No need, Miss Kitty, no need," said Mr. Calvert.

"Pardon, indeed!" exclaimed her father, "it is the vicar's pardon you will have to beg. I have been telling Mr. Calvert how you are all forsaking him."

Nellie coloured deeply at this fatherly home-thrust, but Miss Kitty merely said, "That is too bad, father," and then fell to laughing merrily.

At the dinner-table Allan met the other members of the Wallworth family and liked them better. Jake, the

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brother who had obliged his eldest sister, Mary, by going with her to the chapel that morning, he felt particularly drawn to and the two were soon on excellent terms.

"Never been out this way before?" asked Jake across the table.

Allan said that he had not.

"Fine country, and very pleasant living here," said Jake.

"So I should imagine," said Allan.

"I will show you 'round after dinner."

Allan thanked him and said that it would give him great pleasure.

The fiery-headed young fellow, with the pince-nez, was looking at his brother, and, at that moment, caught his eye.

"You promised the girls, you know, to go down to the boat," he said in his surly fashion.

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten for the moment. Perhaps Mr. Jepson would like to come with us instead of going for a walk? We have a house-boat on the river," he explained, "and we are going to have afternoon tea there."

"Perhaps Mr. Jepson would prefer to go to Sunday school?" suggested Mary.

"Oh, bother school," said Jake impatiently.

"That's what *you* say," persisted Mary, "but what does Mr. Jepson himself say?"

Allan coloured deeply at this pointed question, but replied that, as he was a stranger, he thought he should not care to go to the school that afternoon.

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"Then that is settled," said Jake. "Mr. Jepson will come with us and we will have a jolly time."

A "jolly time" on Sunday afternoon was not exactly what Allan had bargained for in promising to go down to the river, but it was plainly what Jake meant, and what scores of others meant also who had turned their feet in the same direction. All along the riverside gaily dressed people were promenading when Allan arrived with the Wallworths, and the pretty colours of sunshades and dresses made the scene brilliant.

Allan was amazed. When he had come along by the riverside that morning with the minister not a soul was to be seen and a holy calm rested over it all; now, after the lapse of a few hours, the place was like a hive of swarming bees.

On the river, too, pleasure boats were darting about in every direction, young men in flannels rowing young ladies in muslins, many of them holding up Japanese umbrellas to ward off the fierce rays of the sun, and looking particularly graceful and negligent as they lay back in the stern. Allan had never seen anything like it before, and was entranced at the loveliness of the scene. All thought of its being the Sabbath faded from his mind, and he entered with zest into the afternoon's enjoyment.

They went down to the edge of the river and hailed a boatman.

"'Fairy,' sir?" asked the boatman, touching his hat, and Jake answered, "Yes, the 'Fairy' will do."

"Can you row, Allan?" asked Jake.

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"Yes," Allan answered. He had been the best oarsman during his time at Kingswood.

"One oar or two?"

Allan said he preferred two.

"Well, that is our house-boat yonder—the one with the pretty red blinds. Kit will take the tiller if you will help me to row the 'Fairy' out."

Allan was delighted and took the forward place while the girls watched him with interest, and Edward, with his pince-nez, quizzed him critically.

"You are quite an expert, Mr. Jepson," said Kit as the boat shot out into the stream.

Allan blushed at the compliment, and said that he had not handled an oar since he left Kingswood.

"You were at Kingswood, then?" said Nell.

"Yes."

"School for ministers' sons?" queried Kit.

"Yes, Methodist ministers' sons."

"And you are a Methodist, of course?"

Allan looked up. "Of course," he answered, smiling.

"Why 'of course'?" asked Kit.

"Well you said 'of course,'" laughed Allan.

"But cultured Methodists do not remain Methodists now-a-days."

Allan caught a "crab" in the astonishment that suddenly overtook him at Kitty's words, a mishap which set the others laughing merrily.

"Who told you that?—Miss Kitty, who told you that?" asked Allan presently.

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"Told me what? Oh, about cultured people leaving Methodism? My own observations."

"Then I am afraid your observations are at fault, Miss Kitty. I could tell you——"

"I could give you a dozen instances in this very neighbourhood," interrupted Miss Kitty. "Besides, haven't you read the papers? Only the other day the secession of the daughter of a great connexional man was announced."

"Secession is hardly the word," said Nell; "it was a love affair, a marriage in fact that caused it."

"In that particular case, yes; but the excuse is beside the question, and the great fact holds good that cultured Methodists seek entrance into the Establishment. . . . And rightly, too, I think. There is very little culture in Methodist circles."

Allan's cheeks were aflame with indignation, but, before he could reply, Edward, adjusting his pince-nez, interfered.

"Oh, drop it!" he grunted. "We do not want a discussion upon church matters here. What the dickens does it matter where people choose to go or where they do not? All the sects are much of a muchness; so drop it at once!"

Allan thought the red-headed Edward as rude and as unmannerly a young fellow as he had ever seen, and was on the point of telling him so when Miss Kit, who was steering, purposely let the boat bump against the house-boat, and in a moment more were all eagerly endeavouring to get first on board.

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Allan roamed over the houseboat with ardent delight. Every part of it was intensely interesting to him, from the sumptuously-furnished cabin to the top deck with its litter of easy cane chairs set out invitingly. But what appealed to him strongest of all was the sense of freedom that came to him the moment he stepped on board. It somehow got into his blood, and he gave himself up to the full enjoyment of the feeling.

Presently they were joined by others, friends of the Wallworths, who had been invited to drink tea with them and soon they were quite a merry party on board. The ladies took the lounge chairs on deck and passed the afternoon in pleasant gossip, while the gentlemen hovered about them gallantly. Tea was served on deck, Kit declaring it much nicer than crowding into the cabin. All the time they were sipping their tea and gossipping, the bright throngs of people on the riverside were promenading up and down, and the pleasure boats, in endless variety, passing and repassing.

When the people began to thin on the shore and the pleasure boats on the river became fewer, Allan suddenly bethought him that it was the Sabbath, and the blood rushed to his temples. He glanced at his watch and discovered that it was time for the evening service. He drew the attention of the others to the fact, and was quick to observe the strange looks that came into their faces.

"No one in Bridston," explained Miss Kit, evidently with the purpose of relieving his embarrassment, "goes to evening service—at least, no one who is anybody. A

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few old women, poor women mostly, and servants go, but those are all."

"Still," said Allan, "I should like to go, if only for Mr. Calvert's sake."

"Oh, very well, you can go," said Nell. "Jake will go with you to the bank and return to us with the boat."

"Now, don't you be foolish, old man," said Jake, "you stay where you are. We will all be going back soon,—in good time for you to catch your train. But why on earth do you want to go to two services a day? Isn't one good enough? You have satisfied the conventional demands. You will be having people calling you goody-goody if you are so dreadfully in earnest about things that don't matter."

An old memory came back to Allan at that moment. At Kingswood years ago he had heard the Governor once warn them about "sitting in the seat of the scornful." That, said the Governor with emphasis, was the last stage of a young fellow's degeneration. Anything might happen after that. "Standing in the way of sinners" was the first stage, but still the final, irrevocable step had not been taken until the young man made himself as one of them and "sat in the seat of the scornful." For the young fellow who had gone so far as that there was no hope.

Allan felt guilty. He was the young man of the Governor's warning. What would come of it?

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XIV

ALLAN MAKES UP HIS MIND

WHEN they were again in the train and on their way back to Rushington, the minister asked Allan how he had enjoyed the day, and Allan, after some little hesitancy, replied that he could hardly tell.

"But—the morning service?" asked the minister, looking at him curiously.

"That was fine—splendid," Allan consented, "but——" and again he hesitated.

"Yes, go on, Allan. Say what is in your heart."

"All the good I got from the morning service was scattered by the experiences of this afternoon," and Allan rapidly outlined all that had taken place.

The minister heard him without a word, and a great astonishment filled his mind as he listened. But his astonishment was not at the things of which Allan spoke—they were all well known to him—but at Allan's earnestness. It was many a day since he had seen one so thoroughly in earnest, and it was refreshing.

But Allan was young, very young, judging from his manner. He had yet upon him the simplicity of his upbringing and he had not yet learned the city knack of hiding his feelings, a really desirable acquirement at

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times. And now, to hide his own, the minister rose and closed the off-side window of the carriage.

"Allan, my lad," he said, when he had again resumed his seat, "there is no use kicking against the pricks."

Allan stared at him in amazement.

"Neither you nor I, Allan, will ever be able to alter the conditions of society."

"But——" Allan was beginning in amazement.

"I know, I know," interrupted the minister, "the things of which you speak are awful—awful. There is no other word for them, and you do right to feel so intensely about the evil of them. But, Allan, there are palliating circumstances. . . . Wait! Let me explain. . . . No, I do not now refer to the long hours people work in these modern times, or to the few holidays they get—these things are certainly contributory to the present state of affairs—in my judgment, the outcome of a growing revolt against old-time Puritanism."

"'A growing revolt'!" gasped Allan.

"By that I mean," explained Mr. Calvert, "that the people of this country are gradually shaking off the shackles of a false pietism that formerly bound them. The revolt is not complete. We are yet very largely under the domination of old Puritan ideas, but the process of development is going on steadily."

"And do you agree with it?" asked Allan incredulously.

"Yes—to a certain extent. I think the broader idea of the Sabbath is the better one; indeed, I think a narrow view of the Sabbath obligations has been the bane of our

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churches. It has, in my opinion, closed the door of the churches against many men whose lives have been beyond reproach; and, after all, Allan, that is the main thing. . . . Mark! I am not now defending the secularising of the Sabbath; God forbid! I am only giving you reasons why I think things are now as they are. . . . But here we are at Rushington."

When they got home the conversation was resumed, Edith joining in it.

"But don't you think, father," asked Edith, "that the revolt has gone too far?"

"I do," the minister answered instantly, "and yet it is but natural. Men let out of prison are apt to make much of their liberty, to abuse it oftentimes. That is a natural reaction. But a sobering time will come, and this country will be all the better for it."

Allan shrugged his shoulders. He by no means saw eye to eye with the minister.

"Since I came to Rushington," he said slowly, "I have learned many things and got out of a good many of my primitive ideas, but I have not yet divested myself of my early views of the Sabbath."

"And I hope you never will," said Edith, with great energy. But Mr. Calvert sat dumb with astonishment—Allan's words had robbed him of speech. Shortly afterwards, however, he dismissed the subject with an appeal to Edith to play something, and the rest of the Sabbath evening was passed in music and singing.

Next morning, Allan left the counting-room for the warehouse, and was soon so interested in his new work

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that he forgot for the time all the distracting and perplexing circumstances of the previous day.

His new work suited him well. There was more variety in it than in the work of the counting-room. Sitting on a high stool all day long using a pen had been almost hard labour for Allan, but in his new sphere the interest was so constantly changing and shifting from one thing to another that he had no time to complain. All day long a perfect stream of retail shopkeepers from all over the country poured into the warehouse to buy and sample goods, and, from the moment he entered the establishment that morning until he left it at night, his whole time was taken up in attending to the wants of the customers.

The work, too, fascinated him. Had he been behind the counter of a retail shop and dealing in small quantities at irregular intervals he might have considered his lot a drudgery, but he was transacting business that amounted to scores and hundreds of pounds at a time, and it thrilled him, fascinated him, and kept him at the utmost pitch of excitement all day long. And, as from time to time, he added up the totals of his sales, and found them swelling into four figures, the fever of the thing got into his blood and made him thirst for more. By the end of the day the grand total had reached what appeared to him a surprising amount, yet when compared with the sales effected by others of greater experience in the same department, Allan's total seemed almost insignificant.

During the whole of that day Allan saw nothing of

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Fairclough, Daggers, or Walters. He was too busy with his new work. He saw them several times during the week, but only for brief moments and he had no chance for conversation with them. Now that he had gone into one of the great departments, his hours had been altered, and not even in the dinner hour had he an opportunity for meeting them. His hours had in fact become so irregular that he never knew when he could be released, and his coming and going depended altogether on the state of business.

One day, after he had been in his new department about a fortnight, Hugh Bottomley came in from one of his long journeys.

"Well, Jepson," he said, "how are you getting on? I heard of your promotion while I was doing Swansea. Allow me to congratulate you."

Allan thanked him.

"Fairclough and the others are still in the counting-house?"

"Yes."

"And there they are likely to remain. But you take my tip, Jepson; put your whole soul into the business and get out on to the road as soon as you can. There's money on the road, Jepson, and plenty of opportunity for any young fellow who has his head screwed on in the right way. Why, my commission on this journey alone amounts to——," and Bottomley whispered the figure in Allan's ear.

"Never!" cried Allan incredulously, for the sum named staggered him.

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"It is so, and I will double that amount next journey, or I am a Dutchman. When I am out on the road I am out to make money, and I take no refusal from customers. They simply have to buy whether they want to or not I went into a place the other day and the shop-keeper met me with a point-blank refusal as I entered. 'There is nothing, Mr. Bottomley, that we want to-day,' he said, and rattled along volubly. I waited until he had exhausted himself and then I said, 'Look here, friend, my firm has not sent me here to supply your wants,' and he stood gazing at me in amazement, an amazement in which I left him for a few moments while I regarded him good-humouredly. 'Wants!' I explained presently, 'nothing of the kind. Any fool on the road can supply your wants or those of any other shop-keeper, but I am here to create a demand.'

"Well, you should have seen that man's face! It was a picture I can tell you, and then he set to laughing uproariously. That was my moment and I seized upon it at once to open my samples. With what result do you think? Why, that I took the best order at that place of all the journey."

Allan was deeply impressed. All day long as he went about his work he could not get Hugh Bottomley's words out of his mind. And he was as almost equally impressed with the remarkable change in Hugh Bottomley's manner and appearance. Life on the road had done great things for Hugh Bottomley. He was vastly improved. Both in manner and appearance he was now the equal of the smartest business man in Rushington. No

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doubt travelling accounted for much of the change. Rubbing shoulders with strangers every day, entering into keen competition with others of his own kind doing business in the same town, were things likely enough to develop the smart, confident appearance and manner which characterised Hugh Bottomley on his return.

But there was still another factor, a powerful one. Hugh Bottomley was making money fast, and money always gives a man assurance. Indeed, a man was nothing now-a-days without money. Formerly—well, he had been so taught—men were esteemed for their goodness, but goodness was at a discount in these hurrying times, and men were everywhere estimated at their money-value. Yes, everywhere, not only in the commercial world, but even in the Church of Christ. He had seen it over and over again, but never so much so as since he had come to Rushington. The men who had the big money-bags and could dump down big subscriptions for this thing or that were the men who were courted and flattered by the Church, whether their reputation for simple goodness stood high or not. It was the old perplexing problem over again, the problem that had harassed him ever since he came face to face with the world. He could not be rid of it. Wherever he turned it assailed him and forced itself upon his attention. He would have to settle it for himself one way or the other, for settled it must be and at once. He could not go on for ever as he was doing, one day full of earnest endeavour and the next thrown into despair; one day burning with purpose to make his mark in the world and the next held in

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check by a questioning conscience. He would have to be one thing or the other, either an out-and-out man like Hugh Bottomley, determined to succeed at all hazards, or allow himself with open eyes to drift to the dead level of swarms of others in the city and become a miserable failure. Those were the alternatives, and the only ones. There was no middle course in business. It was for him to decide.

It was two hours past noon before Allan got to dinner that day. Hugh Bottomley accompanied him to the restaurant, and the chat over dinner with the rising man of the firm settled Allan's future course.

"Of course," said Hugh, "if you have too fine a conscience you can never hope to succeed. I know what I am saying and that it is dead against all that the preachers say, but the times have changed, and the preachers remain where they were fifty years ago.

"The Bible? Well, it is a good book; there is none like it. I admit that unreservedly, but a man simply cannot carry out the whole of its teachings in these days, and, what is more, no one expects a man to do so. The most a man can do is to be faithful to its general principles, and, I take it, neither you or I wish to be in conflict with them. But there is such a thing as being overrighteous, and the Saviour Himself scathingly denounced such people. Believe me, my dear Jepson, the wisest course for you is one that will butter your bread for you on both sides and will put you in the way of obtaining a few of the luxuries of life; and no one, neither man nor God, or even the Church, will blame you. Number one,

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that is the person you have to think about. Nothing else will pay you."

Allan's resolution was taken. He would bend all his energies to getting on in the world. And, if in the endeavour he had at times to strain a point or two, well he would have to do it, that was all. A scrupulously exact conscience was rather an inconvenient thing in business and only stood in the way of success. He was going forward, that was his resolution. He was going to the top, and, when he reached it, the world would applaud and no one question how he had got there.

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XV

IN THE MANSE STUDY AT CROSSTREES

IN the cosy study of the Manse at Crosstrees, the Reverend Cephas Jepson and his dear old friend, the Reverend Peter McPherson, sat together by the fire talking of many things. But a letter which had been brought in half-an-hour ago had changed the drift of their conversation, and their whole thought was now given to the contents of the letter.

Mr. Jepson was greatly distressed.

"I cannot help it, I cannot help it," he said, sighing heavily, after a long spell of painful silence.

"But you must," said his friend McPherson, "you must. You really must not give way like this. That will do neither you nor Allan any good."

"If you only knew all!" sighed Mr. Jepson. "The truth is I have felt uneasy for some time past about the lad . . . and this letter increases my fears."

The old supernumerary learned forward, put his hand on his friend's knee, and said, in a heartening voice, "Have faith, man, have faith! The lad will come out all right in the end."

The Reverend Cephas Jepson shook his head sadly.

"I don't know, I don't know," he said.

"But *I* know!" exclaimed Mr. McPherson.

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The distressed father looked up into the old minister's face.

"Yes, I know," repeated the old man confidently, "and you ought to know, too. Isn't Allan the child of many prayers?"

Mr. Jepson nodded his head, but in a kind of despairing affirmative.

"And have you no faith in your own prayers, man? Why, believe me, my dear friend, the Lord has put a hedge round Allan and he is as safe at this moment in Rushington as if he were here in his father's house. And that is not all. There is Allan himself. He is a young fellow of grit, and can safely be trusted anywhere. Depend on it, my good friend, Allan will win through, as we say over the border. . . . Besides, there is the ballasting you have given the lad. He is not likely to go very far wrong with the start you have given him. He is on the right lines, and his training will stand him in good stead. Why, man, if Allan were my lad I should not feel one bit uneasy about him."

"But what about this?" and Mr. Jepson held up the letter he had in his hand.

"Well, what about it? Read it out again and let us look at it dispassionately. I don't know this Mr. Calvert, though, of course, I have heard a good deal about him at one time or another."

"He has been kindness itself to Allan."

"I do not doubt it. Anyone would be kind to Allan. He is a lad to whom anyone could take."

"That is only half of it. David Calvert is one of the

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best-hearted men in the Methodist ministry, and he would do exactly the same for any other man's son as he has done for mine. I shall never be able to repay his kindness."

"Oh, I don't question his kindness, but all the same Allan is a lad to win kindness. But read the letter again, read the letter. What is it he says about money-getting?"

Mr. Jepson slowly read out the paragraph:

"'Of late Allan seems to be wholly absorbed in money-getting, the curse that attends every young man almost that comes to Rushington. We have not seen him for weeks. When we came to our new circuit, as you know, Allan left us to go into private lodgings, and, since last September, he has only been here twice. Edith has met him several times in the city, but he has always been too busy to say more than a few words to her. Poor Edith! We sometimes thought that she and Allan would have made a match of it, but it seems unlikely now. And, to tell you the truth, though I said nothing to anyone, I had set my heart on it, for what could have been better than that the children of two old chums should unite in wedlock? But Allan seems to have got into a different set now, to wit, the Wallworths of Bridston, and—well, that dream, like many another, is at an end.'"

Mr. Jepson paused and looked up into his friend's face.

"Well," said the aged minister, "what is there to trouble about in that? Looked at, fairly and squarely, it simply means that Allan is giving all diligence to his

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work and has no time for love-making. But read on."

Mr. Jepson held up the letter to the light again and read once more.

"'I hear that the firm thinks highly of Allan.'"

"To be sure, to be sure," said Mr. McPherson; "couldn't help it."

"'Mr. Watson told me the other day that since Allan had gone on the road occasionally, the flowers and feathers department did twice the business in the district where Allan travelled."

"Good, good," interjected the supernumerary. "So far Allan is following out the apostolic injunction, 'diligent in business.' Go on, go on."

"'But I am afraid Allan is neglecting the first things,'" read Mr. Jepson, and paused again. "That is the sentence that troubles me," he said, looking up.

"But in what way? What is the full meaning of the words? Read on still."

"'The empty state of the churches here and their apparent lifelessness have greatly affected him, and I am afraid that he has been judging the character of the religion of the Master by the things which he sees here.'"

"As any other man would," said Mr. McPherson.

"But Allan ought to know better."

"Read on."

"'He has grown critical, and now rarely goes to chapel except it is once in a way to the Mission services.'"

"Which shows," said the supernumerary, "that Allan is not wholly neglecting the first things."

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"But, why to the Mission?"

"But, why not to the Mission?"

Mr. Jepson had no answer. As a circuit minister the thought in his mind was that Allan should have attached himself to one of the Rushington circuits, but he was too loyal to say so,—too loyal to any effort put forth to win the souls of men, particularly when that effort was sanctioned by the full weight of the Conference, to utter one word that would even indirectly seem to slight such effort.

"The fact is," said Mr. McPherson, "Allan goes where the fire is. What is it Mr. Calvert says? The churches are empty and lifeless? Well, the great Rushington Mission is neither one nor the other. Its halls are full to overflowing, and its services are warm and helpful. I am inclined to think that Allan is following out the second part of the apostolic injunction, and that he is not only 'diligent in business,' but 'fervent in spirit.' What else is there?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Then I am also inclined to think that Allan is not unmindful of the third part of the apostle's injunction, and that he is 'serving the Lord.' Come, come, my friend, I must preach the doctrine of the larger hope to you. You are too much given to take a narrow view of things. But you must reflect that a young man in Allan's position in life is not to be judged by conventional standards. . . . Still, if you have any doubts about the lad, why not write and frankly tell him all your fears and ask him to ease your mind? Or better still, why not go down

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to Rushington yourself and visit the lad? A day or two spent in his company would give you the exact position of affairs. You might spend a Sunday in the city and see things for yourself."

Mr. Jepson thought the suggestion capital. Indeed, it had been brewing in his own mind. The only difficulty about it was his appointment at Crosstrees. But Mr. McPherson said that he would supply his pulpit for him that Sunday, and so the matter was settled.

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XVI

ALLAN HAS HIS FLING

ALLAN and Jake Wallworth became great friends. After Allan's visit to Bridston with Mr. Calvert, Jake met Allan frequently in the city and the acquaintanceship begun by chance ripened into good fellowship.

But the friendship thus formed between the two young men could not be satisfied with the occasional hour spent in each other's company during the day, chiefly in the dinner-time, and so it came to pass that Allan, two or three times a week, accompanied Jake to his home at Bridston, spent the evening with him, and returned to Rushington by the last train.

At first Edith resented these frequent absences of Allan, but she regretted it almost immediately afterwards, and told herself that Allan had perfect liberty to do just what he pleased and to go where he pleased, regardless of her,—which was, of course, the truth. But she could not hide from herself the fact that the friendship Allan had formed with the Wallworths was weakening the bond which, in the secret of her heart, she had thought was growing between them. The time came in the course of the Methodist triennial for her father to remove to another circuit, a neighbouring one as it chanced in this

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case, and Allan, who elected to go into private lodgings in order to be near to his work, seemed cut away from her altogether.

"You will be more your own man now," said Jake Wallworth when Allan told him of his new abode.

Allan reflected a moment before answering and then said, "Yes; you have hit the situation exactly, though it did not occur to me in that way before."

"Then," laughed Jake, "you have felt precious little restraint upon you while living with the parson."

"Very little," Allan agreed, "but——"

"Mr. Calvert is generally considered a good fellow."

"He is the best of men," said Allan warmly.

"Not one to go poking his nose into things which do not concern him?"

"No, not at all."

"And broad-minded, I should say?"

"Never knew a minister of religion so broad-minded."

"But yet," said Jake, "he *is* a minister and that always counts for something. A fellow cannot do exactly what he likes while living in a Manse, even though the parson be as broad-minded as they make them. One must always show respect and consideration for the cloth."

"Just so, just so," said Allan, and the conversation sank deeply into his mind.

Strange to say, a few days afterwards, the post brought Allan a letter from his father bearing on the same subject and putting it in a new light.

"Of course, Allan," wrote the Reverend Cephas, "it

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was not to be expected that the happy circumstances of your living under the hospitable roof of Mr. Calvert could be continued for ever, but I trust that in your new home you will not throw off any of that gentle restraint which living in such a house as Mr. Calvert's must necessarily have been laid upon you. Whatever you do, my dear boy, keep your ideals high and endeavour to live up to them. There is always sure danger for the young fellow who lowers his standard when a restraining influence is removed and who says to himself, 'Now I am free to act as I please without let or hindrance.' None of us, Allan, in this world, is free to do that, but many a young fellow has made shipwreck of faith by believing it."

With this letter in his pocket, Allan, for some weeks, strove to be true to his ideals. But his striving was prompted by resentment. He was grieved that his father should have thought it necessary to write to him in that strain. What could be his father's thought of him? Was it that of a giddy young fellow who needed constant whipping to be kept up to the mark? He had no thought of lowering his standard and he did not need urging to realise his ideals.

So the letter had an effect on his son's mind different from what the Reverend Cephas intended. Had Allan received it twelve months before it would certainly have produced quite another result, a sweet reasonableness and a tender yearning towards home. But Allan was changed. Life in the city had made another kind of man of him. Once he was dependent, now he counted himself independent. At any rate he felt himself quite capa-

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ble of taking care of and judging for himself without reference to his father. Indeed, if the truth must be told, Allan had come to think of himself as the one more capable in such matters. What could a simple-minded, unsophisticated old man, who had passed the greater part of his days in quiet country circuits, know of the ways of the world?

Free from restraint! Yes, Jake Wallworth had certainly hit the nail on the head. He was now alone in the big city and could come and go just as he pleased without a single soul having the right to say to him yea or nay. And, therefore, he would do just as he pleased, if for no other reason than to show his independence. Should he be any the worse for so doing? Not a bit of it.

While in this mood he scribbled a pencil note to Daggers and sent it down to him in the counting-house:

"Anything good on at the theatres just now? A. J."

In a little while back came the answer:

"Not this week, but a good company coming to the *Gaiety* week after next with a good problem play. Like to go? If so, I am your man for Friday evening that week. D. D."

Allan read the note with disappointment. He was not anxious to see a play, but he was burning to assert himself. His attention, was, however, just then called off from his own grievance by the grievance of a customer who had come in to complain of the quality of some

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goods sent in the last order, and it was quite half-an-hour before he could revert to his own affairs. Then he scribbled another note and sent it down to Daggers.

"Yes, I will book Friday in the week after next. A problem play or anything else of an outrageous character will just suit me at present. But is there nothing wicked going on anywhere else where one might have his fling? A. J."

Daggers took the bait instantly and carried the note to Fairclough.

"Seems Jepson wants to go the whole hog. Can you oblige him?"

Fairclough scanned the note thoughtfully, and looked at Daggers.

"What has come over him?" he asked.

"Don't know, unless he means to cut clean loose from the parsons. He has been drifting that way for some time."

Fairclough nodded his head thoughtfully.

"I don't know that he will be any the better for it in the long run," he said presently.

"Don't?"

"No, I don't."

Daggers laughed sneeringly.

"You are not going to begin to preach?" he asked.

"I am not, and I am afraid it would not do you much good if I did, but——"

"Not an atom. But, hang it all, Fairclough, can't you say something to oblige Jepson?"

"What can I say?"

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"How about the races you were speaking of yesterday?"

"Good gracious! Jepson wouldn't go to the races."

"Wouldn't he! Just the thing to suit him, judging from this," tapping Allan's note.

"Well—but no, I think he had better not. Why should he? He has almost got the world at his feet now and might lose all if he were seen at the races. It would go against him, you may depend."

"Stow that! Will you or will you not oblige Jepson?" demanded Daggers.

"He can please himself," answered Fairclough, "but he won't go at my invitation."

"Then he shall go at mine," replied Daggers, and at once began to write this answer to Allan's note:

"How will the races suit you? Charlie and I are going to Chester on Monday and will be glad of your company. You can have your fling to your heart's content at Chester. D. D."

That note made the blood rush to Allan's face. The answer was not exactly what he had expected, but after all it was not more than he had asked for and he could not, therefore, say no to it. Indeed, when he came to think about it, perhaps nothing suited him better. It was an out-and-out proposal from his point of view, and he would at once accept it. Of course he knew there would be betting and drinking and rowdyism on the course, but he need have nothing to do with these. His business would be to see the horse-racing, a truly English sport, and, in itself, a noble one. The people who

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condemned horse-racing pure and simple were people who had no love for sport of any kind, while a still vaster number in their condemnation thought only of the wickedness associated with it. Yes, he would go to Chester. It would be the surest way possible of asserting his independence and an object-lesson to all who would keep him under the old restraint.

It proved an object-lesson to himself also. Up to that time all Allan knew of racing had been gathered from hearsay, but his imagination, in its wildest moments, had not pictured to him one tithe of the scenes actually seen.

The trains were packed with people coming and going into the station from every quarter when they arrived at Chester that Monday morning, while the streets were thronged with crowds and blocked with vehicles. By dint of pushing and struggling, together with Fairclough's familiarity with the "ropes," Allan and his friends at last succeeded in getting on the course, and a most wonderful sight met his gaze. He had of late been several times with Mr. Ingerson to great foot-ball matches where thirty thousand people witnessed the games, but here on the race-course were at least a hundred thousand and almost anything beyond that number he liked to imagine. Allan was staggered at the vast seething multitudes and filled with enquiring wonderment at its strange complexity. All classes seemed to have come together from the lowest to the highest. At one point of the course they passed with difficulty a serried array of carriages, dog-carts, broughams, coaches, waggonettes, and the like, plainly

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belonging to what Daggers euphemistically described as "the upper ten," and filled with gaily-dressed women and men in holiday attire. Many of them were standing up in their carriages surveying the course through field-glasses; others taking luncheon, and champagne bottles were in great evidence, while all were engaged in loud and lively discussions in which the women's shrill voices rang out the louder.

"A pretty kettle of fish," was Fairclough's contemptuous comment as they passed, while Daggers maintained that they were a "jolly set," and Allan, though he said nothing, felt like backing up the view expressed by Daggers.

A little farther on they came to a group of book-makers shouting out the odds they were laying. Fairclough whispered to Allan that he could not afford to hazard much, but he took an offer of ten to one on Starlight, and laid down his money. Daggers was at that moment arranging a few bets with another book-maker on his own account. Allan's head began to swim. He had asked to be taken where he might have his fling and he was certainly in the place where he might indulge his fancy to its full. But, when Fairclough urged him to venture a "quid," only one, on the favourite, he refused absolutely and turned away sick at heart.

A moment after he found himself hustled and jostled by a surging crowd, and Fairclough cautioned him, "Button up your pockets, Jepson, and mind your watch." When they got free from the crowd they were assailed by the strident voices of pedlars and showmen crying

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out their wares or inviting the people to come and see the greatest wonder of the age.

Presently they were swept into the midst of another crowd where someone was speaking at the top of his voice.

"Some prosperous bookie," explained Fairclough, but Allan was instantly aware that it was not so.

"You are fools and blind!" the speaker was crying out with strong emphasis, "you are bartering away your eternal souls for the chances that a horse race may give you for grabbing some other man's money. Some other man's, mark you, for what you do not earn by honest labour is not yours, and you come into it by robbery. . . . . And the chances! They are one against a thousand! A sudden jerking of the reins, a quiet and stealthy dodge in the stable, a secret bribe to the jockey, and where is your favourite? Oh, men, be men, in God's name, and do not ruin both your pockets and your souls by listening to the book-makers and the men here on this race-course to-day for the very purpose of leading you to disaster."

Allan was trembling from head to foot. He knew the speaker's voice well. He looked up and his eye caught the glance of Mr. Rosson's, who just then was looking down upon him from his place on the lurry on which he was standing. Both men gave a start of surprise. The next moment Allan was dragging Fairclough by the arm out of the crowd and Daggers was following them in no pleasant mood.

A bell rang and they took up their positions so that

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they might see the race. The great moment had come and a hush was falling on the vast concourse of people, the hush of expectancy. So silent was it that had Allan been nearer a certain white tent erected just outside the course he might have heard the missioner's voice in prayer, followed immediately by another and another of his helpers.

At the starting-place a white flag presently fell and the next moment, the horses bounded away whilst the crowds looked on and held their breath. Allan's thoughts were far away. That look of Mr. Rosson's held him. He could hear the coming thunder of the horses' hoofs on the turf, but he saw nothing save Mr. Rosson's eye and the startled look on his face.

The horses swept past him. Fairclough cried out excitedly that Starlight was leading, but Allan heeded him not. Daggers, on the other side of him, was cursing his fate for having put his money on a horse that was dropping farther and farther behind, but Allan's interest in the race had gone. It was over soon and the crowds yelling in vexation or screaming with delight as the race had happened to affect them, but Allan was heedless of it all and was looking as miserable as a man could.

"Hello!" cried Fairclough, observing him at that moment, "what's up, old chappie? You look as white as a sheet."

"I am not well," said Allan.

"Not well! Am awfully sorry. Here, take a swig at my flask," and Fairclough produced it from the breast-pocket of his coat, gently shaking it at his ear before

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handing it to Allan. "By George! it's empty!" he cried, "How's yours, Daggers? Just a little in it? That will do. Let Jepson have it. It will pull him round. . . . . Oh, don't be a fool, Jepson! I know you are a Tee-tee, but this is in the way of medicine. All Tee-tees take a little at times in that way."

But Allan was firm. He was going home, he said. He would not be better till he got a sleep. Sleep was the only thing that would cure him.

No, they need not return. He could go alone. He had no wish to drag them at his heels; and off he set at once.

Fairclough and Daggers stood a moment or two watching him as he made his way through the crowds.

"What did I tell you, Daggers?" asked Charlie, when Allan had got clean away. "Didn't I say the race-course was no place for Allan Jepson? But you would have your way."

"Pooh!" said Daggers, who was not only growing rapidly unsteady on his legs, but quarrelsome also, "it has done him no harm as I can see. What better is Jepson than anyone else, I should like to know?"

"No," said Fairclough with meaning. "Perhaps it has done him no harm. He seems to have got a sickener of it."

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XVII

MR. ROSSON VISITS ALLAN

NEXT morning Allan was off with his skips packed with samples on one of his rounds and did not return to Rushington for more than a week. He then learned, for the first time, that most serious things had taken place in the counting-house during his absence and that both Fairclough and Daggers had been dismissed at a moment's notice for drunkenness and neglect of duty. While Allan was with the unfortunate men on the race-course his presence had been somewhat of a restraint upon their actions, but, when Allan was gone, they threw themselves with reckless abandonment into all that was going on around them with the result that they were both arrested for drunkenness and brought before the magistrates the next morning, and the firm, hearing of it, at once gave them their marching orders.

Allan learned the grave news with the greatest concern. It staggered him and filled him with apprehension. He had been their companion on the race-course; it was the merest accident that had sent him home without them. Had he stayed what might have been his lot? Though he certainly would not have been drunken, for he was still a staunch abstainer, he could not have separated himself from their folly.

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He trembled at the thought of it. He had escaped by "the skin of his teeth." He recalled his father's paraphrase of a well-known saying, "There goes Cephas Jepson but for the grace of God," and he applied it in all humility and with a good deal of fear to himself.

But he felt none the less guilty. He had escaped, but he had been the associate of the two who had met such swift retribution, and it alarmed and troubled him. He had done well for the firm during the week on the road, and had been commended by the head of his department, but the gratification at finding his work appreciated was marred by the fate of his companions. All that day he was haunted and harassed by the thought of it.

Allan went home that night with a heavy heart. He had promised to go to Bridston with Jake Wallworth for the evening, but, in the afternoon, he had sent Jake a note saying that he did not feel well and begging to be excused. But he was not to be left to himself. He had scarcely finished his tea when he heard a knock at the front door, and, a moment afterwards his landlady announced a visitor.

"To see me!" he cried, turning with astonishment and displeasure in his voice.

"Yes, sir," answered the woman, handing Allan a visiting card.

Allan's face grew deadly pale as he glanced at it.

"Ask him to step in," he said hoarsely, and, a moment afterwards, the Reverend Arthur Rosson was shown into the room.

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"Home again?" said the minister cheerily in greeting, and taking Allan's outstretched hand.

"Yes, I returned to town this morning. Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Rosson put down his hat and gloves and then drew a chair up to the fire.

"I am not disturbing you?" he asked, glancing at the table.

"Oh, no, I have quite finished," and Allan rang the bell for the removal of the tea-things.

"And what kind of a journey have you made of it this time, my friend?" and Mr. Rosson placed his hand good-naturedly on Allan's knee.

"Very good—very good, indeed," Allan answered, becoming somewhat relieved.

"Sent up the orders ten per cent?"

"Twenty."

"Twenty!"

"Quite that; perhaps more."

"Well done; well done; I am delighted. You are getting on famously at your place, I hear. Mr. Watson has several times spoken to me about you. He has, I may tell you, high opinion of your business capabilities."

Allan flushed with pleasure.

"I say that to you, my friend, not to flatter you in any way, but because I think it is high time you should know it. You are in the firm's good books, and are likely to advance rapidly. Indeed, so far as I can learn, nothing can hinder you—except yourself."

Allan winced visibly at the reservation, but Mr. Ros-

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son seemed not to see it and took up the poker to stir the fire.

"How is friend Calvert doing?" he suddenly asked. "I haven't seen him for some time past now."

Allan was obliged to confess that he did not know.

Mr. Rosson faced him suddenly with raised brows and a questioning look, the poker still in his hand.

Allan shook his head. "I really don't know," he said.

"How is Edith then?"

Allan blushed deeply. "I have not seen her for weeks," he said.

"You amaze me! I thought you two were making a match of it?"

Allan tried to laugh, but it was a poor, sickly attempt that he made.

"Then you really know nothing about the Calverts?"

"No."

For a while Mr. Rosson sat silent, playing with the poker. But, presently, he asked in his quick decisive way.

"No quarrel?"

"Oh, no."

"Just simply the usual drifting apart of friends who have once become separated?"

But to that Allan would not agree. He had been busy. He had been kept close to business of late, and had been away from Rushington a good deal. The Calverts lived a good distance out—well, there were a score of good reasons why he had not seen them of late.

Mr. Rosson changed the subject.

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"What do you think of Mr. Ingerson's new move?" he asked.

Allan had not heard of it.

"Not heard of it! Why, it is the talk of the whole city."

"You forget," said Allan smiling, "that I have been away from the city for over a week."

"This matter is not of a week ago, but of this morning only. Haven't you seen the papers?"

Allan shook his head. He had an evening paper in his overcoat pocket, but he had not glanced at it. He had been too busy during the day to read the papers. But what was this new move?

"Just this," said Mr. Rosson impressively. "Mr. Ingerson has turned his business into a huge coöperative company."

This was, indeed, news to Allan, and he showed by his countenance how much it amazed him.

"For that is just what it amounts to," went on Mr. Rosson in explanation. "He has taken every man in his employ into partnership with him and given him a share in last year's profits."

"Every man in his employ?"

"Every man—even the carters who haul the goods have become profit-sharers."

Allan could scarcely grasp it, and Mr. Rosson explained at length to him just what had happened. Mr. Ingerson had become a Christian Socialist. For years past he had been growing towards that end, but it was only within the last few months that he had come to ac-

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cept all that his development involved; and yesterday he had publicly carried out his ideas to their only logical conclusion. His view was that the labourer was not only worthy of his hire, but that he was also entitled to a share in the profits over and above his hire. It was not fair in his opinion that the employer should reap all the harvest and that the man who sweated and toiled, oftentimes under the most exacting conditions to health, body, and mind, should have no direct interest in the harvest reaped. The toiler's labour was his share-capital in the business and he should justly receive his due portion of the profits.

Mr. Rosson paused and looked at Allan.

"And is that the principle Mr. Ingerson has adopted?"

"That is the principle," replied Mr. Rosson. "What do you think of it?"

Allan hardly knew. At first blush it seemed to him altogether utopian, but he did not know—he did not know. It was all so new and strange to him that he could not at that moment pass an opinion on it. Of the heart that prompted the carrying out of such a principle he thought much. It was magnificent, magnificent. . . . But, as a working principle, well,—he had his doubts.

Mr. Rosson, however, had none. It was, in the minister's opinion, a most righteous principle and he wished that every Christian merchant in the city would follow Mr. Ingerson's lead. As it was, Mr. Ingerson had given the lead—he had set the grandest object-lesson in Christian ethics ever known in commercial circles, and it could not fail to influence the whole country. But, apart from

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the righteousness of the matter, it would prove a splendid working principle. Did not Allan see how each man would put his whole heart into the work, seeing that he had got a direct interest in its success? Looking at it from a commercial point alone, Mr. Ingerson had made a magnificent investment through which he would probably reap a hundred-fold.

A few moments more and the minister was on his feet preparing to go.

"I felt I should like to call on you," he was saying. "A minister naturally feels an interest in a minister's son. I will look you up occasionally. Shall we see you at the Hall soon? . . . The only services in the city you enjoy? Well, come and join us. I will not press you now, but think it over, think it over. . . . You play, don't you? And sing? We should be glad if you would help us sometimes in our Saturday evening concerts. You would like them—they are a great success, and we get the Hall filled to overflowing every Saturday night. The concerts keep hundreds out of the public-houses. You will think it over? Very well; I'll put Sister Marion on your track. None like the Sisters for getting hold of derelict young men," and Mr. Rosson laughed good-humouredly.

"Oh, by-the-bye," he said, when he reached the open door, "an awfully sad affair that at your place."

Allan coloured deeply. He could not speak. It was Mr. Rosson's first hint at the trouble that had come to Fairclough and Daggers.

"I saw mention of it in the papers first, and then I

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heard of their dismissal. Do you know, Allan, nearly all the young men who are ruined in this city are ruined through drink and gambling. . . . But good-night. You will think that matter over?"

A moment afterwards he was gone.

Allan had a great deal to think over that night, but of nothing did he think so seriously and deeply as of Mr. Rosson's visit. It was the first Mr. Rosson had paid him, and it was as plain as could be, though, he had never mentioned the specific object, why he had called that night. Allan was grateful to him for not mentioning it. It was both tactful and kind, but Allan knew perfectly well what was behind it all. He knew that he was suspected of lapsing from the church; that his presence on the race-course had concluded Mr. Rosson in thinking that he, Allan, was going headlong to the devil, and that, from that night, a new influence had entered into his life, a new restraint had been put upon his actions—a restraint which would prove itself more subtle, more watchful, and more difficult to evade than any other.

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XVIII

PULLING TWO WAYS

FOR days afterwards the talk on 'Change and in the City centred in Mr. Ingerson and his profit-sharing scheme and many and various were the opinions expressed concerning it. Hugh Bottomley was bluntly critical. It was absurd, he declared impatiently; it was the scheme of a dreamer that must fall to pieces in the attempt at its practical application; to him it appeared the beginning of the ruin of a great and an honourable house. Over and over again, during the week, did Hugh Bottomley return to the subject, and he seemed to take it as a personal grievance that Mr. Ingerson should have acted as he had done. It was not the way millionaires were made.

Allan looked up and laughed.

"Is it your ambition, Hugh, to be a millionaire?"

"It is every man's ambition," answered Hugh, "at least, every man engaged in commerce."

Allan did not laugh this time. There was something in Hugh's set face that killed the laugh, something hard and grasping, something so inhuman that Allan shuddered involuntarily.

At noon Allan was threading his way through the crowded streets to the café where he usually had his midday meal when someone touched him on the shoulder from behind. He turned to face Davy Daggers.

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"What about Friday evening, Jepson?"

Allan fairly staggered at the question. He remembered his promise with loathing. He had promised to go to the *Gaiety* to see the problem play. But much had happened since then and he now had no wish to go. He had seen enough. The sights on the race-course had proved more than sufficient to satisfy his mood; a mood only born out of resentment and which in no way represented his true character.

"The promise still holds good, I suppose?" queried Daggers.

"Do you really wish to go?"

"I do; I am told the play is a regular 'hot un.'"

"I have no wish to go."

Daggers raised his brows. "A promise is a promise, you know."

"But things have changed."

"You don't mean to say that you are now going to cut a fellow just because he is down in the world?"

"You know me better than that," answered Allan, and yet, all the while, he was conscious of a fearful feeling of being seen talking to Daggers.

"Then, where shall I meet you on Friday?"

"Have you lunched?" asked Allan, evading the question.

Daggers laughed ironically. "You forget that I am out of collar," he said. "See! that is all the money I possess in the world," and Daggers drew several coppers and one three-penny-piece from his pocket and held them in his open palm.

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Allan's blood ran cold. "Then, how are you living?" he asked.

"Am not living. Am just hanging on to the pater's coat-tails. But I have sent in several applications for 'sits' and I can hardly fail to get one of them."

"What has become of Fairclough?"

"I saw him yesterday sitting alone on a seat in the Park. He is awfully cut up. Doesn't know whatever he is going to do. Said he thought of pitching himself into the canal, but I proved to him that he was a fool. He will get over it. Naturally, he is down in the mouth a little at first, but he is just the fellow to get on his feet again soon. It is harder on Fairclough than on me. I have the old people here to fall back upon, but poor Fairclough's are miles away—in the country somewhere."

Allan's face grew white. His heart ached for Fairclough.

"It is devilish hard on him, I know, but it wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't been robbed——"

"Robbed!" cried Allan in astonishment.

"Robbed of every blessed penny. All his winnings at the races. We were fools, Jepson, fools. Too much brandy. . . . But how about Friday?"

Allan shook his head.

"You are never going to back out!"

"If you call it backing out—yes. I really have no interest in the play."

Daggers fumbled in his pocket.

"Yes, here it is," he said. "Your own note, Jepson. I will read it to you. 'Yes, I will book Friday in the

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week after next. A problem play or any other of an outrageous character will just suit me at present.'"

"Yes, when that was written, but not now."

"Is it the theatre you object to? I know you are a bit of a Puritan."

"No."

"Then, what?"

"I make no objection whatever. I simply say I am not going."

Daggers looked done. He began to whistle indifferently, or to make a pretence of it. But, a moment or two afterwards, he said, "Well, you are surely never going to do me out of the pleasure of seeing the play?"

"You want me to pay."

"I have shown you all I am worth."

"I will pay with pleasure,—at least, not with pleasure, for I think you ought not to go. And honestly, Daggers——"

"What?"

"Perhaps I had better not say."

"If what you were going to say was in the way of trying to dissuade me from going to the play, it would only be waste of breath. If I only had a shilling in the world, I would part with it for a seat in the pit."

"Well, it shall not be in the pit this time," said Allan; "you can hire a box all to yourself if you like," and he emptied some money into Daggers's hand.

Allan felt miserable all that afternoon. The fate that had overtaken Daggers and Fairclough was unutterably sad and it preyed upon his mind. But, particularly, did

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Charlie Fairclough's case appeal to him. He could not get rid of the picture Daggers had drawn of his old chum sitting lonely and friendless on one of the seats in the Park, and it seemed to him that he was in duty bound to do something to relieve Fairclough's distress. With this view he mentioned the matter to Hugh Bottomley, but he got no encouragement or sympathy from that young man of iron.

"No," said Bottomley, "if these fellows are fools enough not to look after their own interests they can go to the dogs for all I care."

"But it was their first offence," pleaded Allan.

"The first time they were discovered, you ought to say. But it was not the first time they had neglected business. And it was for that, not their beastly drunkenness, that they were dismissed."

"Not for drunkenness!"

Hugh Bottomley laughed at Allan's simplicity.

"That would have been overlooked had they been worth their salt," he said. "Such lapses are overlooked almost every day in really capable men," and Allan felt once again, as he had been made to feel a score of times before, that the cardinal virtue in commercial life was success, and that success could at any time cover a multitude of sins.

When Allan got home that night he found two letters waiting him. One from Jake Wallworth ran as follows:

"Where have you been since Monday, old man? I have looked everywhere in the City without once getting

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a sight of you. They must be working you to death at Grayson's when you cannot even get to your dinner at the usual hour. However, we want you to spend the week-end with us at Bridston. Kit has arranged a boating party for Saturday afternoon and we are going to have some private theatricals at night in the school-room, kindly lent to us by the Vicar for the occasion. We will not listen to any refusal. Kit tells me to say that she will 'box your ears' if you say nay. You know her way and how she carries all before her. Perhaps I may see you to-morrow, but, in case I don't, drop a line to Bridston to say that you are coming and then I will look out for you at the station on Saturday so that we can go down together."

That letter pleased Allan well. He had learned to esteem the Wallworths highly and was always at home among them. Somehow, of all places, he seemed to be more himself at Bridston than anywhere else. There was no nonsense about the Wallworths, except it was with Edward, who really was stupidly arrogant and senseless at times, though he scarcely ever troubled them and loved to go mooning about alone. The girls were gems, particularly Kit. He had half fallen in love with Kit. Of course, only in a brotherly sense; but she really was charming and wholly irresistible. She would box his ears! How delightful! It was just like Kit to send such a message, and he laughed heartily at the threat. Of course he would go to Bridston. Nothing could give him greater pleasure.

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He took up the second letter and saw what he had not noticed before, that it bore the Crosstrees post-mark and that the address on the envelope was in his father's well-known hand. He broke open the seal of the envelope hastily.

"My Dear Boy," it began, "For once in a blue moon I have an off-Sunday next Lord's Day, and I am going to spend it with you. I shall leave here on Saturday by an early train and hope to arrive in Rushington at noon. I am sorry to say that I shall only be able to stay Sunday over as we have our Quarterly Meeting on Monday evening, but the few hours we shall be able to have together will be a real treat."

A postscript ran: "I am supposing you will be able to put me up, but, if not, don't worry. I am writing to Mr. Calvert, and I am sure of a bed there."

Had Allan received that letter a few days before he would have been overjoyed. But now it filled him with perplexity. Jake's letter pulled him one way and his father's another. He did not want to say no to Jake, and he could not say it to his father. But a way out of the difficulty struck him presently. Why not compromise matters? He could not promise to spend the week-end with the Wallworths now, but he might spend Saturday afternoon and evening with them, and give up Sunday to his father.

"The very thing," he decided, and sat down to answer Jake's letter.

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XIX

WITH THE CALVERTS AGAIN

AN hour afterwards Allan posted the letter and then took a car out to the Calverts to make arrangements for his father's entertainment.

He hardly cared to go. A considerable time had elapsed since he had visited his old friends, and he felt condemned for his neglect. But he was obliged to go to them now, and he would.

The Calverts were delighted to see him, though only the minister said so. The good man grew eloquent in welcoming Allan and grasped his hand as if it were that of a dear friend he had not seen for years and whom he had imagined long dead.

"We are delighted, Allan, we are delighted. . . . And, Sister Marion, too!" for the Sister happened that evening to be spending an hour with Edith. "Come up to the fire, boy. It isn't cold, I know, but I love to see a fire burning in the grate—it makes home so much more homelike and cheerful-looking. . . . Well, this is a pleasure and no mistake. What time is it, Edith? I have half a mind to miss that meeting to-night; if I were not superintendent minister, I would. What do you say? You wouldn't? No, I do not suppose you would. Edith (turning to Allan) is a regular stickler for points of duty. But, Edith, have you nothing to say to Allan?

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Why, don't you tell him that you are right-down glad to see him?"

"I am glad—Allan knows that—but I cannot go into such ecstasies about seeing him as you, father."

Mr. Calvert swung round in his chair and faced his daughter, while Allan coloured deeply.

"Eh! What is that you say, Edith?"

"Allan cannot expect me to grow enthusiastic over the visits of a stranger."

"A stranger, indeed!"

"A negligent friend, then."

"Oh! that's it, is it, you little puss? Well, there is something in what you say and Allan has only himself to blame for it. You have forsaken us altogether of late, Allan."

"And has only come now," persisted Edith with intent, "because——"

"Of that letter? Of course, of course. Your father has written to you, Allan?"

"Yes."

"Didn't I say so?" laughed Edith. "He has only come to-night because he could not help himself."

"Oh, well, we will forgive him now that he is here," said the minister generously, "and we will let bye-gones be bye-gones. . . . Well, Allan, which is it to be? Is good old Cephas—pardon me, I mean your father—to stay with us or with you?"

"With you, if you can put him up——"

"If we *can!* if we *can* put him up! What do you mean, sir? I would turn everyone in the house out of

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bed if it were necessary to make room for my old college chum. If we can, indeed!"

Allan felt ashamed. Not because of what he had just said, but because, in the presence of this great-hearted minister, he felt he had treated his friendship so indifferently in the past. He had found nowhere such friendship as the Calverts, not even in Bridston. The friendship of the Wallworths was all very well so far as it had gone, but it had never been put to the test and strain of that between him and the Calverts, and he doubted whether it would survive such a strain. Yet he was there that night to cast another slight upon the Calverts' friendship and to turn from it in favour of the other! He was thankful as he stood there that the Calverts did not know what was in his mind.

"And, of course, Allan, you will come and stay Sunday over with us, too?" asked the minister. "Now don't begin to say no; there is plenty of room in the house, and it would look well, wouldn't it, to see father and son separated? It will be like coming home again to you to come here, and to us it will be like having a son home from a far country."

Allan was overwhelmed. As well as he could he stammered his thanks. But, there was just one little matter of which he wished to speak. He had an engagement for Saturday evening and could not possibly get out of it. If Mr. Calvert would allow him he would come to them late on Saturday night and stay the Sunday over. But, meantime, could Mr. Calvert meet his father at the station and entertain him until he, Allan, arrived? He

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was sorry to make such a request, but he was in a fix and saw only that way out of it.

"But, Allan," asked Mr. Calvert in astonishment, "won't you be at the station to meet your father? Couldn't you manage that much?"

He was afraid he could not. Of course he had only heard from his father that evening, and this thing had come upon him suddenly. Had he known earlier that his father was coming to Rushington he might have made some other arrangements, but he hardly saw his way to alter them now. A promise was a promise after all.

"But is your engagement so important?" ventured Edith.

Important? Well, that was not the point. He was under a promise and he could not break it.

Edith said no more, and Mr. Calvert closed the incident with, "Well, we will see what can be done, Allan. But get here as early as you can on Saturday night. Cut your engagement as short as possible so that your father may have as much of you as can be."

Soon after Mr. Calvert went to his meeting and Edith, who had been talking with Sister Marion in a corner of the room, now turned towards Allan.

"If you have any engagement to-night, Allan, pray do not remain for our sake."

But that put Allan on his mettle.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded.

"Because I know you are such a man for engagements."

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"You are poking fun at me?"

"No, indeed."

"Then you are trying to wound me for my past neglect?"

Edith raised herself to her full stature. "Neglect? We are used to that. And, as for wounding you, I am only saying what you have often pleaded yourself."

Allan felt the cut acutely. But he was on his mettle now, and he was not going to be driven away like that. Besides, Edith fascinated him. He had never seen her act so superbly before. She looked a very queen at that moment, and the love in his heart for her, the love which he had been neglecting, grew warm and passionate. He would not, he could not go away, and there he would remain in her presence feasting his eyes and firing his heart.

"Perhaps you would like to stay here until father comes back?"

"I should—very much."

"In that case you will be company for mother."

Allan lifted his head and stared at Edith in amazement. But Edith had risen and Sister Marion was already on her feet tying her bonnet strings.

"I am going a little way with Sister Marion," explained Edith.

"What! Now?"

"Yes," and Edith tried to hide her amusement.

"Then I will——"

"Oh, don't trouble. We can manage, I think; what do you say, Sister Marion?"

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"Very well, indeed," answered the Sister, turning her head away to laugh quietly.

But Allan was persistent. He was going with them. What did they take him for to think he would allow them to go alone? Mrs. Calvert? She would not mind staying alone. She was reading her book over the fire and she would be glad enough of a little quiet. See, his hat and stick were in the hall? Well, were they ready? He was waiting for them.

Their way lay through the main arteries of the City and past the theatres and music-halls. Vanity Fair, Sister Marion dubbed that particular neighbourhood, lit with flaring gas-lights and pasted all over with big, glaring posters.

"Were you ever in a theatre, Edith?" suddenly asked Sister Marion.

"Never,—yes, once, now I remember. When I was a child someone took me to a pantomime.

"Were you, Allan?"

Allan felt like a condemned criminal, but he answered promptly, "Yes."

"What do you think of such places?"

"It all depends——"

"On what?"

"Well, there are theatres and theatres."

"You mean——"

"I mean that there are good plays and bad plays. For instance, the plays of Shakespeare——"

"Yes, but that is an old excuse. Those who pretend to go only to see Shakespearean plays often go to see others."

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"Other good plays, possibly. But,—well, there are plays not fit to be staged and which no self-respecting——"

"Tell me this," said Sister Marion pointedly, "do you think any good whatever is got by going to theatres?"

"Yes, I do."

"In what way?"

"In many ways. But you have broached a big subject. For instance, the student of Shakespeare can get a better understanding of the play by seeing it acted than by merely reading it——"

"Shakespeare again! Well, I will put it to you in another way. Ought a Christian man to go to the theatre?"

Allan shrugged his shoulders. "It is all a matter of conscience," he said. "But really, Sister Marion, we are getting into deep water, and I am not posing as a defender of the theatre,—I am simply answering your questions."

"It is more than a matter of conscience. It is a question of what is right and wrong. Conscience is never an infallible guide. Some men's consciences have persuaded them to commit murder. However, we will say no more about it."

They were just then passing the door of the *Gaiety* when, at that moment, an unkempt, down-in-the-world sort of creature ran down the steps of the theatre and greeted Allan effusively.

It was Daggers.

"How are you, old fellow? Going in to-night, after

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all?" jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the theatre. "Fine piece on. Tell me it is making a great hit. Will probably keep the boards for six months."

Daggers had got all this out before Allan could get him to hold his tongue. But Edith and Sister Marion heard every word and heard it all with amazement. They walked slowly on, leaving Allan to settle it with his strange friend.

Allan was furious. What did Daggers mean by accosting him in that manner in the public streets? Couldn't he see that there were ladies with him? And did he think that everyone was as stage-struck as he was?

Oh, it was all very well to plead sorrow now that the mischief was done. He had done him an irreparable injury, and he felt more like flinging him into the gutter than listening to his apology. He could hardly keep his hands off him, and, if it were not that the ladies were just ahead there, he would teach him a lesson that he would not soon forget. And, leaving Daggers staring open-mouthed and open-eyed, Allan strode angrily away.

"A low cur," was Allan's comment when he overtook the ladies.

"Who is he?" asked Edith, and Allan explained that Daggers was one of the young fellows who had been dismissed from Grayson's for drunkenness and neglect of duty.

"And what is he doing now?" asked Sister Marion.

"Nothing,—except going to the dogs."

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"We must try to prevent that," said the Sister. "Have you his address, Allan?"

"No. But you could not do any good with him if you tried."

"Don't you think so?" smiled Sister Marion.

"I am sure of it. Daggers is one of the men of whom you may safely say, 'He is marked out for destruction.'"

Sister Marion would not have that, but just then they had to cross the street and thread their way through the flying vehicles, so the subject was not referred to again.

After going along a little farther together, Sister Marion declared that it was time Edith returned.

"You have come far enough, Edith, farther than we bargained for, but, as Mr. Jepson was with you, I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Mr. Jepson is not returning with me?" asked Edith in well-feigned astonishment, both answering and asking the question.

"Allan is," corrected that gentleman.

"Oh, it is not necessary," cried Edith. But it was plain there was no heart in her words.

"Of course he will return with you," said Sister Marion, "and," she added smiling, "you will have a nice time together," and then she laughed mischievously.

"I hope, Edith," she said a moment after, "you will give Mr. Jepson a right-down good lecturing for his past conduct. He deserves it, you know. I wish I had him to myself for a quarter of an hour; I would make his ears tingle. . . . We know a thing or two, don't we, Edith? Well, you just lay the law down to him. And you will

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not forget to come to see the Girls' Shelters? Bring Mr. Jepson with you—if he will come. Not the place for him? Nonsense; many gentlemen visit the Shelters to be shown round, and, afterwards, become good friends of the Mission. Besides—but good-night, dearie," and Sister Marion kissed Edith affectionately.

"Good-night, Marion. . . . But you were saying?"

Sister Marion held out her hand to Allan.

"I was only going to say that Mr. Jepson would . . . . get as much entertainment . . . . and a good deal more out of a visit to the Shelters . . . . as he would by a visit, say to the *Gaiety*, for example."

And, shaking her head and laughing merrily, Sister Marion backed away out of hearing of Allan's retort.

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XX

THE MASTER PASSION DISCLOSED

FOR a moment or two Edith and Allan stood watching Sister Marion's retreating figure; then they turned and retraced their steps. For a little time they walked along in perfect silence, but each heart was throbbing and each brain almost bursting. The roar of the city's traffic rolled past them and the noises of the streets thundered in their ears, but they heard them not. The silence between themselves was the one thing that held them, and it foretold much more than the great hush in Nature that often presages the storm.

At length Allan felt himself forced to speak.

"Which way shall we take, Edith?"

"The nearest," she said.

"Are you so anxious to get home? I was thinking that we might go round by the Park and have a quiet walk together. There is no hurry for you to get home?"

"No."

"And Mr. Calvert will be late to-night?"

"Yes; it is not likely that he will get home much before ten o'clock."

"Well, what do you say then?"

"I have no objection."

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Allan gave Edith his arm and, in a few moments more, they were walking along a quiet street and getting farther and farther away from the bustle of the city.

"What is that Sister Marion was saying about the Shelters?" asked Allan, plunging at once into the middle of things without any beating about the bush.

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes,—if *you* are going?" and Allan emphasised the words.

"I *am* going, but does that make any difference to you, Allan?"

"A world of difference," he answered warmly, and he felt Edith trembling on his arm.

She grew silent again.

"You believe that, Edith?"

"I am not sure."

"Edith!"

"I will be frank with you, Allan. I should like to believe it, but——"

"You shall believe it, Edith."

"I can only judge from the past."

"Oh, come now, Edith, you are not going to follow out Sister Marion's advice and give me that lecture of which she spoke?"

"I am afraid I must."

"Must?"

"Yes, it will clear the air."

"Then, let me clear it. Edith, dear, do you need me to tell you that I love you?"

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He had dropped his voice to a whisper. She heard him with great joy. But she calmed herself and answered bravely.

"Yes, I did need it—I mean that I could not have gathered it from your conduct."

"But I do love you, Edith. At least, you will believe it when I say it?"

She was silent again for a few brief moments, during which Allan thought he could feel her heart throbbing against his arm.

"You believe it, Edith?" he urged.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I believe it."

Allan pressed her arm warmly. "I love you, Edith," he said, "more than I can express—more than anyone else in the world."

"And I love you, Allan," presently came the answer in a soft murmur while the hot blood rushed into her face at the avowal, "I love you . . . . but——"

"Yes, darling?"

"Is there no one else?"

"No one, Edith."

"You are quite—quite sure?"

"Why do you ask, Edith?" and Allan's voice took a tone of pain.

"Because—because, I want to be quite certain. I could not have my lover dividing his love for me with another."

"Your lover won't do that, Edith. . . . But, jealous already?"

"Yes, I am. I want a whole love or none."

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Her words struck Allan as full of meaning. He was thoughtful for a few moments. Then he said, "You are clearing the air, Edith?"

"Yes."

"Very well, dear, say all that is in your heart."

"I have no more to say."

"But you were thinking something?"

"I was, but your word is enough, Allan. Enough about that."

"Is there something else?"

"There was, but——"

"Theatre-going?"

"No. I have nothing to say of that. I am not prudish and I look at things of that kind differently from some good Methodists. Perhaps that is nothing to boast of, for my studies have brought me into touch with broader views, and father is by no means narrow-minded, as you know. Besides, you are not a theatre-goer, not an habitual one. I was thinking of the young man who accosted us to-night."

Allan's heart sank into his boots.

"What of him?"

"He is an awful example of a young man gone wrong."

"A stage-struck simpleton," said Allan with bitterness in his tone.

"And a drunkard," added Edith.

"And a drunkard," agreed Allan.

"And a betting-man."

"Yes, a betting-man."

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"Visits race-courses and all kinds of questionable places?"

The answer stuck in Allan's throat. Plainly, Edith knew of his visit to the race-course and knew also that he was in company with Daggers on that occasion. Was this what Sister Marion meant when she said that she and Edith knew a thing or two?

"Am I right, Allan?"

"He does."

"Then what I have heard is true!"

Allan was trembling. But he made a great plunge for it.

"And, perhaps, you have also heard that I was with him at the Chester races?"

It was Edith that was trembling now. "Yes, I have heard of it," she said, "but we won't talk of it now. It was an incident, an episode, and it is done with. You have satisfied your curiosity and you are not likely to look on that Vanity Fair again."

"Vanity Fair! It was veritable Pandemonium."

"That is your deliberate judgment?"

"My deliberate judgment," answered Allan with emphasis.

"Then the air is cleared, Allan, and I am happy. Let it pass now—let everything pass; and let us forget that we ever had any misgivings of each other."

Allan's heart was bursting. The girl leaning on his arm was a woman in a thousand, with a nature of infinite tenderness and a delicacy of the rarest excellence. He felt humbled to the dust. And yet, when he thought of

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all she was to him, pride filled his heart that he should call her his own.

From the Park gates they took a car to the Manse and arrived there a full hour before Mr. Calvert's expected return. Mrs. Calvert was still sitting over the fire reading her book when they entered.

"Back again?" she said, lifting up her eyes. "Have you had a nice walk?"

"A most delightful walk, mother," said Edith, kissing her mother vivaciously.

Mrs. Calvert looked up again and saw that Edith's cheeks were red with a glow that was not due alone to walking, and that her eyes were sparkling. She glanced from Edith to Allan, and her motherly heart knew the truth at once.

"What does this mean?" she asked with trembling lips.

Neither spoke.

"What makes you so radiantly happy to-night, Edith?"

"Do I look so happy, mother?" and the glad tell-tale tears were glistening in Edith's eyes.

Mrs. Calvert looked towards Allan.

"Can't you guess?" he asked.

"Guess! Of course, I can guess. But I want to hear it, hear it."

Edith was laughing and crying at once. Allan took her hand in his.

"I have been telling Edith that I love her," he said frankly.

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Mrs. Calvert's eyes filmed with a rising mist. "The other side I don't need to be told," she said.

"You know it?" cried Allan.

"Know it! Would I have been Edith's mother if I had not?" and she rose and kissed her daughter tenderly. "The little heart is at rest now," she murmured soothingly as she folded her child in her arms and let her own tears fall freely. "God bless you, dear Edith, my Edith, God bless you! . . . . And you, too, Allan! God bless you both! It is only the love that He blesses that is blessed indeed. . . . Eh! how proud your father will be this night, Edith! Allan, you know Mr. Calvert loves you as his own son, and it has been the dream of his life ever since you came here to Rushington to have the right to call you by that name. . . . And to think that it should have happened just at this time when your father is coming here! You have set the joy-bells ringing in this home, Allan."

When Allan bade Edith good-night behind the half-opened door he felt as if he had taken part in a veritable sacrament, so pure and holy had been Mrs. Calvert's blessing.

"What a difference a little word makes!" said Edith as they stood awhile holding each other's hand and talking quietly together.

Allan's free arm stole round Edith's waist, and she let him gently press her to his heart.

"It makes this difference," said Allan softly, but there was a subdued passion in the expression of his love.

She looked up into his face and smiled.

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He would not have been a man if he could just then have resisted the temptation of that upturned face. But he did not resist it.

"And the right it gives!" he said, hesitating just one moment, and then kissed her full on the blood-red lips.

"And how bold and forward it makes a girl!" she answered, instantly returning the kiss and then blushing to the roots of her hair.

They were supremely happy and their glad hearts pulsed together as they stood now folded in each other's embrace.

"I wish I hadn't promised for to-morrow," said Allan. "I feel inclined——"

"No," interrupted Edith, "you must not break it now," with just a spice of mischief in her tone, "a promise is a promise, you know. . . . But, perhaps, you can get away earlier?"

"I will," said Allan determinedly.

"Do, Allan. . . . And, remember, in future when promising your holiday hours to others that I come into the bargain now," and she laughed quietly. "No, I am not selfish. You will have engagements quite apart from me, and I shall be glad to know that you are enjoying yourself. But I shall want as much of your company as you can spare me, you know, and the more the better. . . . But you must go now. It will be so late, I am afraid, before you get home."

Allan looked at his watch. It was a quarter past ten. "Mr. Calvert is late," he said.

"Very," answered Edith. "I wonder what can be keeping him."

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XXI

KIT'S DIPLOMACY

AT noon on Saturday Allan met Jake Wallworth at the railway-station as agreed and went home with him to Bridston. Half an hour afterwards the Reverend Cephas Jepson's train arrived from Crosstrees and great was the minister's disappointment at not finding Allan on the station to meet him.

All the way from Crosstrees he had been picturing to himself the meeting with his son; how Allan would be eagerly awaiting his coming on the platform, and how he, Mr. Jepson, would catch a first sight of his boy through the carriage window as the train steamed into the station. But all these hopes were falsified. Was it his lad's fault? No, it could not be. The platform was thronged with hundreds of city men waiting for their trains home—that surely was the reason that he caught no sight of Allan. Amongst such crowds it was small wonder that he should miss him.

The train came to a stand-still and Mr. Jepson, bag in hand, alighted. Still he did not discover the one face his eyes sought, but a hand placed on his shoulder from behind at that moment and a cheery voice asking him, "How are you, my old friend? I am glad to see you," caused him to turn round.

It was Mr. Calvert who greeted him.

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"I would scarcely have known you," said Mr. Jepson, grasping Mr. Calvert's hand.

"No? Have I so much altered? I would have known you amongst a thousand."

"But haven't I altered?"

"Oh, yes, of course—altered in the way advancing age alters everyone, but it is the same old Cephas of Didsbury days," and Mr. Calvert gave his friend a hearty slap on the back. "Well, come along; we will get a car outside the station which will take us almost to our door."

"But where is Allan?"

"He will be with us later on. Had a prior engagement which he couldn't possibly set aside. But I have arranged for him to stay the week-end at the Manse so you will have him near you all through the visit. Come along," and Mr. Calvert hurried Mr. Jepson away.

Meantime, Allan, accompanied by Jake Wallworth, had arrived at Bridston, where they found the others of the boating party impatiently waiting them and eager to set off.

"You are late," said Miss Kit, greeting them.

"No," said Jake, "the train was in good time. But we are quite ready to start the moment you are," and, as they were already in their boating flannels, no further time was lost.

Kit attached herself to Allan.

"What is all this about your returning to-night?" she asked.

"My father is to be at Rushington to-night—is there now probably—to remain over Sunday, and, of course,

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I cannot accept your kind invitation to stay here till Monday. But I am giving you a large slice out of the time, you see."

"We never dreamt of your returning," pouted Miss Kit.

"Nor would I have thought of it if this unexpected visit of my father hadn't occurred. I didn't know anything of it until last night and it came upon me as a surprise. But you see how it is, Miss Kitty?"

"Drop the 'Miss'," she said petulantly.

"Well, Kitty then."

"Why not simple Kit?"

"Simple Kit be it then," said Allan, laughing.

"Without the simple," she said.

Allan laughed again. "But you see how it is, don't you, Kit?"

"That's better. But, as regards that, I only see that we are going to lose the pleasure of your company here. What time are you going back? Not till the last train, I hope?"

"That is the eleven-thirty from Bridston. I could hardly stay so long as that. I wouldn't be kind to my father nor courteous to the Calverts."

"Then, at what time?"

"By the seven train, I was thinking."

"And I am thinking you will do nothing of the kind. Why the theatricals will only just be beginning then!"

Allan felt that his promise to Edith was already in jeopardy, but he made another attempt to keep it.

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"Perhaps," he said as a compromise, "I might catch the eight-thirty."

"Perhaps," said Kit.

"They would be pretty well over by then?"

"Not half over. Did I understand you to say that your father was staying with the Calverts?"

"Yes, with the Calverts."

"Oh, yes, I remember now, they are old friends?—your father and Mr. Calvert, I mean?"

"Very old friends."

By this time they had come to the riverside and the boatman was getting out the boats. Three boats were required, and they had arranged to row up the river as far as Mereside, to take tea at a small refreshment house there, and to row back before evening set in.

Presently, the first boat shot out into mid-stream with its gay freight, and the second followed it almost immediately. But, when the third boat was ready, Kit was suddenly discovered to be missing. They called her name again and again, but she did not answer. "Kit is up to some mischief," shouted several from the second boat. The first boat was already too far off to understand what was occasioning the third boat's delay.

"It is too bad of Kit," grumbled several who stood waiting. "Let us push off without her," someone said, and someone else responded, "Yes, that will bring her out of her hiding-place." Accordingly all the others, save Allan, got into the third boat and rowed away laughing, Allan protesting that he would not set off without Miss Kitty.

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Just then, Miss Kitty appeared, running lightly towards him from behind the boat-house, and laughing gaily.

"Where have you been, Miss?" Allan demanded with mock gravity.

"Kit," she said, showing her pearly teeth.

"Very well—Kit."

"I have been doing good work," she said, still laughing.

"You have been up to some mischief," said Allan, trying to be stern.

"You shall judge," she said, as he handed her down into a fourth boat which the discerning boatman had just brought alongside.

Kit took the tiller and Allan the oars. A few deft strokes soon brought them in the wake of the other boats, the occupants of which were filling all the still air with their merry pealing laughter.

"Now, give me the facts," said Allan dictatorially as he rested a moment on his oars.

"Presently—presently."

He gazed at her a moment. She was laughing joyously. Allan thought he had never seen any one look so beautiful as she did at that moment.

"Why, presently?" he asked.

"Because the time has not yet come to tell you," she answered with pretty pertness. Her eyes were dancing merrily. She looked the very spirit of mischief.

"If we were not seated in this cockle-shell," said Allan, "I would make you tell me."

"Would you, sir? Pray, how? . . . . There, you

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stupid, you nearly upset the boat," as Allan "caught a crab" in his confusion. With almost the next stroke he caught another "crab" which set Kit laughing merrily again.

"Are you trying to drown us?" she asked.

"Goodness knows what I might do before I have finished," answered Allan.

"Well, you might have mentioned your intentions before we started. I wouldn't care to be drowned in this dress—it is almost a brand new one, you know."

Allan was laughing now. "You are a regular plague, Kit," he said.

"That is hardly an original remark," said Kit, "They have been telling me that at home ever since I was a child."

They were sailing perilously near to the bank, and, in their bantering mood, had not observed it. But now Allan looked up and saw that they were within a couple of oars' length of it.

"Kit," he cried, "are you bent on running us aground? Pull your left rope, Kit."

She pulled her right. The boat swung round and plunged into the shingle.

"There! I told you so," cried Allan. "*You* are a fine coxswain!"

"And you are a fine gentleman to look after a lady! One moment you are going to drown us, and the next you make me crash the boat into the shingle."

"*I* make you?" asked Allan in astonishment.

"You told me to pull my right rope."

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"I said left."

"You said right."

Allan laughed. Kit's face was flushed and her eyes sparkling. The mishap had evidently alarmed her for the moment, though she was rapidly getting over it.

"Well, at any rate," said Allan, "we will have to make the best of it now," and he stood up in the boat. "Sit tight, Kit," he cried, "while I push her off with the oar."

But all his pushing was in vain, the boat had jammed so fast into the shingle that he found it impossible to move it.

"We are in a pretty pickle now," he said, and looked up the river for the other boats.

"What are you going to do?" asked Kit.

"Hail the others," and, with his hands to his mouth, was about to suit the action to the word, when Kit interrupted him.

"Wait!" she cried.

He turned his head towards her.

"Wait?"

"Yes, we don't need them. Give another push with the oar and I will help you this time."

She stood up in the boat and, with the other oar, pushed with all her little might, but it did not make a bit of difference.

"We shall have to hail the others," said Allan. But, now when he looked, the other boats had turned a bend in the river and were out of sight and out of hail. Allan turned to Kit with a face filled with perplexity.

"What shall we do now?" he asked.

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"We must walk," she said.

He gazed at her in amazement.

"Yes, it is not far, she said, "only about a mile and a half. The boat can remain here till we return at night with the others to help us to get it off."

"But how are we to get to the bank?"

"That is for you to discover—not me," and he saw that she was laughing at him.

"Though we have grounded we are several yards from the bank and the water here is almost knee-deep."

"Quite that," she agreed tantalisingly.

"Well?"

"Well?"

They both looked at each other and laughed.

"There is only one way," said Allan, blushing.

"Well, let us adopt that way, and quickly," said Kit. "I don't want to sit here jammed until night-fall."

"Do you know what I mean?" asked Allan with diffidence.

"What?"

"I believe you know quite well," said Allan, trying to be stern, and yet laughing in spite of himself.

"How am I to know?" and Kit looked into his face with such an air of innocency that Allan for a moment thought that he was misjudging her.

"To get to the bank I shall .... have to .... carry you."

"Oh, how delightful! Quite a romance that we are having to-day. Won't it be jolly?"

"You won't mind, then?"

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"On the contrary, I think it will be just charming. . . . But won't you get your feet wet?"

At that Allan could not help laughing loudly.

"I will take my boots off," he said.

"Will you really?" and she affected a modesty that the smile playing about the corners of her lips belied.

"Well, what else can I do?" asked Allan.

"What else?" she repeated and shook her head demurely.

"Turn your face away, Kit."

She did so, choking almost with silent laughter the while, and, a moment or so afterwards, she heard the thud of Allan's boots, into which the stockings had been stuffed, as they fell on the bank. The next instant he was standing in the water with his trousers rolled up to the knees, asking Kit if she were ready.

She stood up in the boat.

"Put your arms around my neck."

"Must I?" she asked with a pretty pretence.

"How else can I carry you? I will have to take you in my arms."

She placed her arms as she was bidden with, "Like this?"

"Yes, that is it. Now, let me grip you firmly. . . . I have you now," and with the words Allan lifted her bodily out of the boat. She was but a light weight, but the shingle under his feet made it very difficult to walk and he staggered awkwardly. At that Kit clung to Allan tightly and cried to him to hold her fast.

"I have you,—I have you," he replied.

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"You are sure you won't let me fall?"

"Sure."

"I shouldn't like to spoil this dress."

"You shan't spoil it. . . . But you are almost choking me, Kit. Slacken your arms a little."

"I am afraid."

"Afraid!" and Allan struggled on manfully.

At last he set his fair burden on her dainty feet on the bank. He was panting from his effort.

"Thank you," she said. "Wouldn't it have been choice if someone had come along with a Kodak just then?"

"I don't know about it being choice," said Allan, wiping his brow with his handkerchief. "Neither of us, I am afraid, would have made a pretty picture."

"Oh! you ungrateful thing!" she said.

He was sitting on the bank, flicking his bare feet with his handkerchief.

"Ungrateful, for what?" he asked.

"Worse and worse," she cried. "I really won't let you carry me again—no, never no more," and she turned away with a show of indignation.

Allan laughed heartily. "She's a strange mixture," he said to himself, "and as contrary as a parrot."

At length he got his boots on again and they then made a start for Mereside. Though it was not far it took them over an hour to reach it. They found the others all eagerly anxious to know what had happened.

"We have had such an adventure!" cried Kit.

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They all crowded around her to hear the story. She was quivering from head to foot with pleasurable excitement and flushed and radiant-looking.

"Shall I tell the story or will you, Allan?" she asked, glancing towards him with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"There is little to tell," said Allan abashed. "We ran the boat aground while we were chatting and could not get her off the shingle again."

"And so you left her there?" asked Jake.

"Yes, we left her there,—we could do no other."

"And you have walked all the way?" cried several in chorus.

"Almost all the way."

Allan glanced at Kit and she gave him an answering look which said plainly that she understood it to be his wish that they should keep to themselves the little comedy of the bare feet and the carrying.

"Shall we be able to get the boat off on our return?" asked Jake.

"Oh, yes, with a little help."

"Then that is all right," said Jake. "Come along then, let us have tea. . . . Oh, here is a telegram for you, Allan."

"For me?" cried Allan in amazement. He took the telegram from Jake's hand, ripped open the envelope, and read these words:

Don't worry. Will wait supper till last train. Father arrived and well. Edith.

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He looked up wonderingly. Kit was laughing. He suspected her instantly.

"Facts, Allan, facts," she said. "You were asking me a little while ago for facts. Now you have them."

"Was that what you were doing when we suddenly missed you at the starting place?"

"I was sending a messenger."

Allan's face clouded.

"You did wrong, then," he was beginning reproachfully when she put her hand over his mouth.

"Then why did you say you were going home so early? At any rate, you have permission now to stay."

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XXII

AND ALLAN'S CHAGRIN

WHILE Allan was passing an enjoyable afternoon with Kit Wallworth, the Reverends Cephas Jepson and David Calvert were passing quite as an enjoyable a time together in the Manse study.

"I am not at all sorry," Mr. Calvert had declared, "that Allan is not here this afternoon to monopolise your time and attention; we shall have a long talk together."

So, with the window of the study thrown open, the two men, reclining on lounge chairs with their feet resting on hassocks, recalled the days of yore and lived over again during that afternoon the times and scenes of the long ago.

Downstairs, in the sitting-room, Mrs. Calvert could hear them ever and anon break out into jubilant laughter as some almost forgotten incident of their college-days was recalled or some old story repeated; and Edith, flitting about the house with her heart joyously beating in expectancy of Allan's coming, would flush with pure delight as she thought of the solid happiness that had come into her life and into the lives of the two men upstairs through Allan's love for her.

Of that tender subject the two men had much to say to each other.

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"It has been the dream of my life, Cephas, ever since I clapped eyes on Allan, and it now seems as if it is going to be realised to its full. Strange, that it should have blossomed out at this juncture, just when you are visiting here? It seems as if it were to be. As I told you I was away when it happened, and I only learnt it from the wife when I came home after Allan had gone, so that I have not seen him since. I couldn't sleep for very joy last night."

"And I confess to you, David, that I am looking at everything through the medium of this new-found joy. It has brightened all my hopes. Allan will be all the better for the influence of your accomplished daughter."

"And Edith will be the gainer by having Allan at her right hand," magnanimously replied Mr. Calvert.

Meantime Kit's plot had been successful and Allan had perforce found himself obliged to remain at Bridston until the last train. But he was by no means pleased by it and strongly resented the ruse that had been played upon him.

"It was an unwarrantable liberty on your part, Kit, to wire."

But Kit only laughed merrily.

"Those who come here," she said, "soon learn that my will is law."

"So it would seem," answered Allan, and joined in the laugh.

"And, of course, you are glad that it is so?"

"Glad?"

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"Yes; isn't it nice to feel that you are saved the trouble of arranging things for yourself?"

"I don't know about that—I will tell you what I feel," he added suddenly.

"Yes?" and Kit arched her brows coquettishly.

"I feel that——"

"Yes?" for Allan hesitated purposely.

"I feel that you are . . . a regular plague."

"Is that all? I thought that you were going to say that you felt . . . something else," and she looked at him demurely.

Allan was laughing now.

"Well, I do," he said, "I do, but——"

"Oh, never mind explaining," she cut him short, "It is time we went into the schoolroom now."

When the private theatricals, in which Kit took a leading part, were over, Allan tried to get away again. But Kit would not hear of it, and he had to go back with them to the house for supper. It was, as Kit had said it would be, the last train before Allan got away. The clocks were striking twelve in Rushington when he arrived in the city.

He was in no happy mood. The pleasures and excitement of the day were over and they had left him depressed and remorseful. He had been a fool. Against his own better judgment he had allowed himself to be influenced all day long by Kit Wallworth instead of following the bent of his inclinations and getting away early to Edith as he had promised. Only last night he had plighted his troth to Edith and all that afternoon and

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evening he had spent the time flirting with another girl! He was ashamed of himself, ashamed to his heart's core, and covered with confusion. How should he meet Edith that night? How should he explain the telegram Kit Wallworth had sent? He devoutly wished now that he had never set eyes on Kit Wallworth, or, at least, that he had been man enough to cast off her charms. But she had gone her length. He now knew her for what she was, the most fascinating girl who had ever crossed his path, but with nothing of the sterling worth of his Edith. He determined that he would avoid Kit Wallworth's company in the future.

It was half-past twelve when he reached the Manse. Someone was standing in the shadow of the door looking out. A moment's glance convinced him of whom it was.

"Edith!" he cried, still approaching.

"At last, Allan!"

"Yes, at last. Have I kept you all waiting up?"

"I have been at the door a score of times looking out for you."

"And catching cold," said Allan.

"We were all getting anxious about you. . . . Listen! they hear us within. That is your father's voice. He is coming,—coming. He has been restless all day to see you. . . . Oh, here he is!"

The next moment Allan and his father were face to face and the long delay of waiting forgotten in the joy of meeting.

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XXIII

"THE FRIENDS THOU HAST, AND THEIR ADOPTION TRIED."

SUNDAY in Rushington was a great day with the Reverend Cephas Jepson. In the morning he sallied forth with his son to hear a great divine of another communion preach, and came home in the third heaven of delight. In the afternoon he visited the branch of the great Mission at which Mr. Ingerson laboured, and saw there a work in the midst of the slums that gladdened his heart. In the evening, accompanied by Edith and Allan, he went to the Historic Hall, where all the delights of the day were crowned in the overwhelming character of the mighty service.

Sister Marion met them at the door as they were passing into the great Hall and insisted upon finding them seats on the platform, though it was much against Allan's wish. "Mr. Rosson," said Sister Marion to Mr. Jepson in explanation of her action, "will be delighted to see you, and it is customary to ask distinguished visitors to sit on the platform."

The Reverend Cephas was overjoyed. He in no way thought of himself as a distinguished visitor, but he felt that it was a delicate and graceful act to invite a brother minister from a country circuit to a prominent position.

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For half-an-hour he sat on the platform watching with interest the people streaming into the Hall. His feelings were inexpressible. He had never seen anything like it before, and all he had heard of it conveyed to him only half the truth.

When the Hall was almost full the band began to play, and then a quiet-looking man stepped forward to the front of the platform and announced a hymn. The band struck up again, the great organ pealed forth, and the vast audience, still sitting, joined in singing the hymn, the sound of the thousands of voices swelling like the thunder of the ocean.

Presently, from one end of the platform, about a dozen in single file entered and took their places, while, from the other end, about the same number of Sisters followed their example, Sister Marion leading the way. She took the chair next Edith, having the Reverend Cephas Jepson on her other side.

"Which is Mr. Rosson?" asked Mr. Jepson in a whisper.

"He has not yet—yes, he is just coming on the platform now," answered Sister Marion.

"The minister with the pointed beard just turning grey?"

"Yes."

"Quite in his prime yet," thought Mr. Jepson. "But, of course, I had forgotten; he is my junior in the ministry by fifteen years according to the Minutes."

Mr. Jepson sat watching the missioner. There was nothing unusual about his appearance and certainly noth-

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ing to convey the impression of greatness. Yet, that he was great the Mission testified.

After bending his head a moment or two in prayer the missioner surveyed the large audience critically and gave instructions to some of the workers for the filling up of gaps. There were groups of people still standing at the doors and in the aisles, and the workers all over the building now urged the people in the seats to sit closer together. At the close of the hymn the missioner assisted the workers by making a request from the platform. "You will be all the warmer," he said good-humouredly, "if you will help the workers to keep the draughts out," and the people responded smilingly to his request. When at last everyone was seated that could be, another hymn was announced. The people rose *en masse* at the word and Mr. Jepson's heart leapt within him at the magnificent sight. While the people were singing the first verse of the hymn the missioner turned about and viewed the platform. Allan was sitting only a few chairs away from where the missioner was standing and he caught sight of Allan immediately.

"Glad to see you, Allan," he said hearteningly, coming forward. "And you Edith! May I ask——"

"The Reverend Cephas Jepson," explained Sister Marion.

"Thought so. Very good of you, Mr. Jepson, to come up to our help. Perhaps you will take the opening prayer?"

He did not wait to hear Mr. Jepson's reply, but was off to his own place on the platform again. Mr. Jepson felt

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a great trembling come over him. He had been a preacher for nearly thirty years, but he had never faced such an audience as that before him. There was no evading it, however. At the close of the hymn the missioner announced that the Reverend Cephas Jepson would engage in prayer and, a few moments afterwards, all Mr. Jepson's trepidation had vanished and he was standing in the immediate presence of the Eternal, almost oblivious of the mass of people before him, and praying with an earnestness and reverence that subdued every soul in the vast building.

"I am not sure that I do right in preaching to-night," declared the missioner afterwards. "A man so mighty in prayer as the Reverend Cephas Jepson, who is here as a visitor to-night, and whom we are all delighted to see, would I think be the proper person to address you. . . . . But I remember that he is a visitor and will content myself now by expressing the hope that he will on a future occasion favour us by preaching in this Historic Hall."

A murmur of approval at these words rumbled round the congregation and then the missioner began his sermon.

After the sermon came a prayer-meeting, during which the enquiry-rooms were packed with seekers. Mr. Jepson was thrilled with the great sights he witnessed and was as busy as the best of the workers amongst the penitents. When all was over he went home in a delirium of joy, walking so fast that his feet scarcely seemed to touch the pavement.

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At home they found that Mr. Calvert had been waiting an hour for their return.

"Well, what do you think of it all, Cephas?" were the words with which he greeted his friend's return.

"Think of it! Magnificent, magnificent. The half was never told me."

"You would scarcely see another such audience in England?"

"Nor a church where such power is felt, such saving power. Why, it was like another Pentecost to-night!"

"Then you have had a good time?"

"Good time is not the word for it. With a hundred or more people in the enquiry-rooms it was simply a marvellous time, a marvellous time. Why, David, the power in that Hall to-night was simply irresistible. Men and women were literally swept into the enquiry-rooms, willy-nilly, broken-hearted and penitent. It reminded me of what we have heard and read of in the days of Whitefield and Wesley."

Through all the supper-time Mr. Jepson continued to talk about the great Mission, but, after supper, Mr. Calvert slipped away to his study for a while on the pretence of looking at something of importance, but really so that his old friend should have a chance of having a little private chat with his son. Mrs. Jepson and Edith also suddenly found that they had certain matters to attend to in another part of the house, and so Allan and his father were left alone.

"You have altered a good deal, Allan, since you left home," Mr. Jepson began. "You will always be a boy

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to your mother and me, but . . . I cannot help observing that you are past boyhood now."

"I suppose, father, I have changed as most other people have changed," said Allan, smiling.

"You have changed wonderfully, my boy. Why, you are no longer a boy now. You are quite the city man in . . . in appearance, and as unlike the Allan of two years ago as can well be imagined."

"And yet, dad, I am the same."

"I trust so, I trust so,—nay, I believe so."

"Had you any doubts about it?"

"Not exactly doubts," replied Mr. Jepson slowly, "but I have been wondering what influence city life has had upon you."

"It has broadened me considerably, and has been all for the good."

"Broadened? What do you mean, Allan? Many use that word to excuse a certain laxity into which they have grown. . . . I hear that you are held in high esteem by your firm, and I am delighted to hear it, Allan, but—well, you know your father's heart—I should be glad to hear that you were held in equal esteem by the churches for your good works. . . . But," and the pause was ominous to Allan, "I do not hear that you are even a member, Allan."

Allan was not prepared for this straight talk, and became instantly confused. "I go to the Mission oftener than elsewhere," he managed to say.

"Then why not join the Mission as a member? Mr. Rosson would, I am sure, be glad to enrol you, and you

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would be in the very heart of things. Think it over, Allan, and when you write again let me know your decision. I seize upon this opportunity to say this to you while the others are out. But don't let it depress you. I am overjoyed to hear of your worldly success, and," Mr. Jepson dropped his voice to a whisper, "this alliance with my old friend's accomplished daughter makes me glad beyond words."

Allan's heart beat high.

"Edith is a good girl, Allan, a good girl, and deserves a good husband. . . . And she will get the best of husbands in my own noble boy. Only, Allan . . . for a perfect union, the one thing needful must be possessed by each. You understand? . . . And now, Allan, tell me about your prospects. It is Sunday night, but this is the first time we have had a chance to talk together alone since I came."

Allan was touched to the heart's core by his father's tenderness and frankly told him of all his hopes.

Mr. Jepson listened with delight and commended Allan again and again.

"There is only one thing to fear, my lad," he said, "and I think I need hardly mention it—the narrowing lust of gold. Keep your heart free from that, Allan."

Allan smiled consciously. "I am quite lust proof, father," he said, "I value money only for what it can purchase and not for the hoarding——"

He did not finish the sentence, for just then the door opened and Mr. Calvert came bustling into the room. A few moments afterwards he was followed by his wife

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and daughter, and presently Edith sat down at the piano and played a hymn. That was the beginning of a happy evening which was passed in hymn-singing until prayer and bed-time.

Going upstairs that night, Mr. Jepson placed his hand on Allan's shoulder and said with strong feeling, "You remember the advice of Polonius to Laertes, 'The friends thou hast and their adoption tried——?'"

Allan nodded vigorously, his heart full.

"Grapple them then, Allan, to thy soul with hoops of steel;" and, when he got into bed, Mr. Jepson was still thinking of the holy influence of Mr. Calvert's happy home, for, over and over again, he said to himself before he fell asleep, "Allan can never go very far wrong while he is in touch with such a home as this."

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XXIV

"THE GOD OF THIS WORLD"

EARLY the next morning the Reverend Cephas Jepson returned to Crosstrees, and Allan was left to himself once more. But, for weeks afterwards, the influence of his father's visit held him in restraint, and, from the love he bore him, Allan lost no time in associating himself with the church.

Mr. Calvert was delighted, and Edith and Sister Marion overjoyed. "Allan will be such a help to the Mission," the latter said to Edith, "and no end of good may result from it."

But neither suspected that Allan had only joined the church in obedience to filial duty and from no deeper motive. Nevertheless, during the following weeks, he was in almost constant attendance in the evenings with Edith at the Historic Hall, and Edith felt that Allan's anchor was cast on a sure grounding. But, when Mr. Rosson accosted Allan one night with the request that he should take up some definite work, for which he might hold himself responsible, Allan hung back and hesitated. He could not, he said. He was so often away from Rushington, and for weeks together at a time, on the business of his firm that it would be simply courting disaster to put him at the head of anything. His part

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in the Mission, he averred, could never be that of a leader, but of a worker only. . . . A class in the Sabbath-school? He did not feel called to that. A local-preacher? That least of all. Hewers of wood and drawers of water were always wanted and he would be content to serve in some such humble way. Was it necessary that he should spring to the front? Mr. Rosson shook his head and said nothing more; but Edith thought that Allan and answered wisely.

During all these weeks Allan kept away from Bridston. He had met Jake Wallworth several times in the city, and had even dined with him, but, when Jake had urged him to run over to Bridston with him, Allan had always excused himself. One day, however, Jake came to Allan with a definite proposal from Kit, and assumed his old rôle of refusing to listen to a "No." Kit was growing vexed, he said, at Allan's treatment, and was asking what she had done that he should slight her so? It was all humbug for Allan to say he was not slighting her, and, supposing he, Jake, were inclined to accept that statement, Kit was a woman and, therefore, could not be expected to do so. Would Allan promise to run over next Saturday?

Allan hesitated. He was really in a dilemma. He did not wish to say "no" to Kit, and yet he felt that he dared not say "yes."

"Does silence give consent?" laughed Jake.

"No—not exactly," answered Allan.

"Then, why are you hesitating?"

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"The truth is I don't know where I might be on Saturday next."

"Going on the road again?"

"Yes,—at least, I suspect so."

"Oh, well, of course that alters matters for Saturday next. But what about the Saturday after? Kit will not listen to a refusal. The girl is madly taken up with you, Allan,—that's straight, and I shouldn't like to disappoint her."

Allan blushed and Jake laughed.

"Well, that is the plain fact," he said, "Kit is clean gone on you, Allan."

Jake's words rang in Allan's ears all that afternoon and sank into his heart. His vanity was flattered. Kit Wallworth was, when all was said and done, a good sort, he told himself more than once, and would one day make some fellow a capital wife, but it would not be he. Had not Edith crossed his path—well, he might even have been tempted to win Kit for himself, but that was a thought which he could not entertain for a single moment. And, after all, Edith was his deliberate choice. Kit was a fit companion to while away a pleasant hour,—pert, vivacious, and entertaining, but that was all. At least, that was all for him.

Allan spent that evening with Edith, and, in her society, Kit faded from his mind. There was no possible comparison of the two. Edith was what he had often heard his father call his mother, "a womanly woman." She had grace, charm, tenderness, and sympathy. Kit had grace and charm, but she had never yet shown him

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that she possessed either of the other qualities. Kit was excellent as a plaything, but Edith commanded his respect.

During the evening, Allan went with Edith to a church meeting. A grand bazaar was to be held in connection with Mr. Calvert's church, and Edith, who was heart and soul in working for it, enlisted Allan's help and sympathy. Allan was nothing loath to help. There was always some fun at bazaars—people discarded their starchiness at such times and worked together with a will. There might be better ways of raising money for church purposes, but certainly there was no better way of bringing the people into line for one object.

The meeting had already commenced when they arrived at the church and the point just then under discussion was whether raffling should be allowed or not. One gentleman was on his feet protesting vehemently against it. Christian people ought not to countenance such things. The world was looking on and the example set by the church in such matters was a grave and a serious matter.

He had scarcely resumed his seat when another rose to his feet. For his part he could see no wrong whatever in the proposal. The gentleman who had just sat down had exaggerated the intention of the proposal. Well, if he hadn't exaggerated it, then, he, the speaker, didn't know the meaning of words. What suggestion of gambling could there be in a church bazaar? Everyone who paid his money for a ticket did so with the full purpose of helping the funds and did not care a brass

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farthing whether he won or not. It wasn't as if some one person were going to gain at the expense of others; the value of the article raffled was generally a mere bagatelle, and it was the bazaar itself that was the sole gainer. And this was what everyone worked for and agreed to; therefore, where did the element of gambling come in? Raffling at a church bazaar was simply a harmless conspiracy between friends to help the funds of the church. He had no scruples on the question, and, for the life of him, he did not see why anyone else in the meeting should have any.

Following this speech dead silence prevailed for the space of three whole minutes, the members sitting looking at one another in diffidence. Then the first speaker uprose again. He was sorry there were two opinions amongst them on the question; indeed, to be candid, he was amazed. But, as he saw it, the question would now have to be decided, not by the opinion of one side or another, but on its legality solely.

Where was the illegality of it?

He appealed to the chairman. But the chairman's answer was drowned in a babel of voices amongst which the word "lottery" was bandied about from one to another in alternate tones of affirmation and exclamation.

"Lottery?" cried the supporter of the proposal, jumping to his feet again. "What harm is in that? It was a common Bible practice. In the Mosaic dispensation it was not only frequently employed, but ordered, in certain ceremonial rites. Aaron cast lots upon the two goats, which should be the sin-offering and which the

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scape-goat. At the word of the Lord, Moses divided the land by lot amongst the tribes of Israel. Saul was chosen King by lot, and Matthias an apostle. It is only when the lottery was used for unrighteous ends that there was harm in it."

Sitting at Edith's side, Allan listened to the discussion with intense interest.

"What do you think of it?" Edith whispered.

"I hardly know," he answered.

Edith glanced at him. "I am opposed to raffling," she said.

"So was I until I came in here," Allan replied, "but the last speaker has made out a good case."

Edith felt the blood rush to her face at the words, but it was not until they were wending their way home again that she had a chance to speak fully on the subject to Allan.

"Such a thing as raffling would not have been thought of in connection with our church a few years ago," she said. "And the idea of bringing the Bible into the question!" she added indignantly.

"Yes, it was rather neat, wasn't it?"

"It was absurd—ridiculous."

"Perhaps it was. But what I mean is that it was rather a neat way of putting an old contention; and it undoubtedly told on the meeting."

"It undoubtedly did—at any rate, on a section of it."

"And does it not, therefore, bear out my contention that but a thin line now-a-days divides the world from the church?"

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Edith feared that it did, but, the next moment, corrected herself and said that she did not think so. "And yet—and yet, it is a difficult subject, Allan."

"And a puzzling one, I admit."

There was no pressing need for them to hurry home. The meeting had closed sooner than they expected, and there was yet an hour to spare before it would be time for them to say good-night. Arm-in-arm, therefore, they went along lovingly together by a circuitous route towards home.

Allan spoke of his hopes, and Edith listened with sympathy. He was gradually going up. When he first came to Rushington he had determined to succeed, and he was gradually realising his ideal. It had been hard work at first, but that was because he could not bring himself into line with the business ways of Rushington, but he had got over that difficulty now. He had been fettered and clogged with scruples, but he had soon discovered that life was a struggle and that it was not possible to get on in business without conforming to the ways of the world. Oh, no, Edith, must not misunderstand him. He meant nothing more than that "when a man was in Rome he must do as Rome does."

"Even though it be against his principles?" shot out Edith.

Allan felt himself pulled up suddenly.

"What a girl you are, Edith, for taking one's words literally!"

"Didn't you intend them to be so taken?"

"No, certainly not. I used them figuratively. My

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whole meaning is that I now know the ways of our firm and am in its good books. Of course I am a long way from the summit of my ambition, but two such promotions as I have earned in less than three years do not fall in the way of many young fellows."

Allan had meant his words to show how good his prospects were, and they certainly did. But they also showed Edith another thing. Allan was drifting. She had suspected it for some time past, but his words that night proved it beyond doubt. He spoke of having got rid of certain scruples, of conforming to the world, and, underlying the words, the whole trend of his life stood revealed to her. It was a terrible discovery. It frightened her. Like many another young man before him, Allan was going down under the pressure commercial life was putting upon him. The god of this world was blinding his eyes. She trembled for him. His integrity and character were at stake.

She did not say then to him what she feared. She could not; the discovery had come upon her overwhelmingly. But she determined to tell him the next night what was in her heart, to tell him calmly and deliberately. The post, however, the next morning brought her a letter from Allan informing her that he had been suddenly called upon to "go on the road" again, and that the business in hand would keep him some days from Rushington.

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XXV

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

ALLAN'S absence from Rushington ran into nearly three weeks. When he got back to the warehouse he found that great changes had taken place. Mr. Watson sent for him immediately and had a long conversation with him. It was a most unusual thing. Mr. Watson was generally a hidden person to almost all in the firm, except the heads of departments with whom he frequently conferred; but it was rarely known that a lesser employee had audience with him. As for Allan himself it was the first time that he had come into personal contact with the great managing-director since he had left the counting-house.

As Allan entered the room, Mr. Watson motioned him to a seat. Then, for a few moments, he went on writing. Presently, however, he swung round in his chair and faced Allan.

"I have been looking over your orders on the road," he began at once, "and I am well pleased to see that you have made so successful a journey. As compared with the last round in that district, your orders exceed that one by several thousands of pounds."

Mr. Watson turned again in his chair and fingered some loose papers lying on his desk.

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"That is not all. I have here a record of all the journeys you have made on the firm's behalf, and I see that in every case your orders exceed those given before. I congratulate you——"

Allan bowed and stammered his thanks.

"And," continued the director, "I congratulate the firm on having such a capable servant."

Mr. Watson was warming to his subject. He rose from his chair and went and stood with his back to the fire.

"Some changes have taken place in your absence," he went on, "and, of course, they will affect your future position here. Mr. Williams, of your department, is joining the Board of Directors, and Mr. Hugh Bottomley has taken his place as head. There is no better man in the building than Mr. Bottomley and he will do well for us—I am convinced of that. Of course you have not been with us so long as he has, but you are showing his aptitude and talent, and I say to you quite frankly and freely, the firm thinks so well of your work that had Mr. Bottomley not been here, no other man could have stood in your way of promotion to the head of your department."

Mr. Watson paused a moment or two impressively, and Allan again stammered his thanks.

"I say this to you to encourage you, but, as for thanks, you know well enough by this time that the firm never gives anything—praise, promotion, or anything else—for nothing. A man's good work is all the thanks the firm requires."

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It was the real Mr. Watson after all. Allan had just been thinking as he listened to the high compliments paid to him that all the tales told by inferiors of Mr. Watson's hard-headedness were pure inventions, but the true character of the managing-director, business-like, hard, unrelenting, and exacting, again broke forth.

"And now who is to take Mr. Bottomley's place? After what I have said to you the answer will be plain to you."

Allan looked up into Mr. Watson's face.

"Do you relish the proposal?"

"I am exceedingly honoured," answered Allan.

"And so will be the firm, if you accept this appointment."

"I shall do so with pleasure and alacrity."

"Very well then, that is all. The business between us is settled very happily. You have only been an amateur casual on the road so far, now you will become one of the firm's regular travellers. . . . Salary? Oh, you take Mr. Bottomley's place in everything. Good-morning."

Allan rose to go. At the door, however, Mr. Watson called him back.

"Oh, how is your father?"

"He is well, thank you."

"Still in the—see, what circuit is it?"

"Crosstrees. Yes, still there, sir, but he changes in September next."

"Where is he going then?"

"He does not yet know."

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"No invitation?"

"No. But Conference will place him somewhere."

"Somewhere! Ah, yes, I forgot. A man in the Methodist ministry gets into a groove after he leaves college and remains in it through life unless something exceptional and extraordinary happens. And there is little hope, I fancy, for ministers in country circuits getting invitations."

"That is so, sir."

"And yet—what was it now? I heard something lately. Has your father been in Rushington?"

"Yes."

"Recently?"

"Yes—a few weeks ago."

"Well?"

Allan looked puzzled.

"Let me see, I think I heard of him having been somewhere. Where could it have been? Did he preach while here?"

"No, but he was at the Historic Hall."

"Of course, of course. He opened the service with prayer?"

"Yes."

"And, from what I hear, made a great impression. There should be no difficulty in such a man getting a good circuit. I will keep him in mind and see what can be done."

Hugh Bottomley had been in charge of the department for a week or more when Allan returned, and had already made his presence felt. Some of the men told

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Allan that Bottomley seemed to be everywhere at once and that nothing escaped his eyes. If he gave an order one moment he was back again almost the next to see if it had been performed and fumed terribly if it were not. Their lives were becoming a burden to them, and several threatened to resign their positions and seek work where they would not be so driven. Allan thought the complaints ominous of what was in store for himself, but he listened without remark and then went forward to the new head's private office.

Hugh Bottomley received him cordially, but it was soon evident to Allan that the old relationship between Hugh and him had changed, and that henceforth he would be compelled to look upon Hugh as his chief and not as an equal.

"I congratulate you upon your appointment," Allan said, as Hugh turned to greet him.

"And I congratulate you. But it will be uphill work for all of us."

"Why uphill?"

"I shall not be satisfied," Hugh answered with strong emphasis on every separate word, "unless this department shows treble the turnover at the end of the half that it does now."

Allan was surprised. "I always thought this department," he said, "had the credit for having the largest turnover in the building."

"Quite right; so it has. But that won't do for me. Things will have to go up by leaps and bounds, or I shall know why."

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"Have you some new scheme in your mind?"

"No, nothing new. But I shall expect every man in the room to put forth all his energies and to give his whole heart and soul to the business."

Allan said he could not speak for the others, but that as for himself he could not do more than he was doing. He should consider himself fortunate indeed if he were able to hold together the business Hugh had obtained.

"You will do more than that, Mr. Jepson," said the new head with marked meaning, "mistering" Allan for the first time.

Allan laughed, but he felt annoyed. "If I do it will be a miracle," he said.

"It will only be what will be required of you."

Allan's cheeks flushed with anger.

"We may as well understand each other at once, Mr. Jepson. This department has got to treble its business, and you must do your share towards it. Simply to keep the business I have got together on the road you are about to take over would be mere child's play; you have got to add to it considerably. You understand? Any fool can hold what he has in his hand and the firm does not pay big salaries for that. You understand?"

Allan bit his lips with vexation. "I understand a good deal," he said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing—only that I see the descendants of the Egyptian taskmasters are not all dead yet."

Bottomley's eyes flashed angrily. "Is that meant for an insult?" he demanded.

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"It is meant to show you that I perfectly understand the relationship you wish to exist between us in the future."

"I am glad you have tumbled to it so readily," said Bottomley with a sneer. "It will save a world of trouble."

"But, as for helping to treble the business," pursued Allan, "I will do my best for the firm as I always have done,—I can do no more."

"The results will show," said Bottomley, and turned on his heel.

It was an inauspicious beginning, and Allan felt it to be so. For the first time since he had left the counting-house, his work that day was a burden to him. The master's eye was upon him, and, though he had always laboured as if that were so, he was now conscious that it was not the eye of an encouraging master, but the critical, fault-finding eye of a taskmaster.

At noon Allan met Jake Wallworth at dinner and told him of the change. Jake was indignant and strongly advised Allan to resist Bottomley at the beginning. There was nothing like putting one's foot down at once. In Jake's opinion, Bottomley was challenging for the mastery, and while Allan would submit properly enough to Bottomley as, of course, he would to any other head, it would be ruinous both to his own self-respect and peace of mind if he allowed Bottomley to ride rough-shod over him.

In the evening alone with Mr. Calvert in the Manse study, while Edith and her mother were out shopping

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in the city, Allan sought the minister's advice on all that had happened that day.

"What would you do?" he asked after repeating Bottomley's insistent words about trebling the business.

Mr. Calvert thought a moment or two and then asked, "Can it be done?"

"Only in one way."

"And that?"

Allan hesitated.

"Certain methods of business?"

"Yes."

"Questionable methods?"

"And shady."

The minister's brow clouded.

"What does your conscience say, Allan?"

Allan shrugged his shoulders. "Conscience does not count in business. The man who pays too much attention to conscience in commercial life soon goes under. . . . And, after all, we have to live."

Mr. Calvert rose from his chair and crossed to the window. For a few moments he stood looking out on the bald street. A haze had come on with the fall of night and the gas-lamps glimmered dimly through it while the hoarse murmur of the streets and the roar of the traffic rose to his ears. Never before had he felt so sad or looked upon a more pitiable sight. It was a weary, weary world, a hard and cruel world.

"I am sorry, Allan, sorry,—grieved to my heart's core that you should have been driven to this conclusion. But, though I hoped against hope, it is only what I

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dreaded and expected. Almost all the young men who come here to enter upon commercial life sooner or later come to the same unhappy conclusion."

"What else can they do?"

"Nay, I know not."

"Is it not a right and practical conclusion?"

"Practical—perhaps; but, as for its being right, I confess to you, Allan, I hardly know what to say. I really do not know how to advise you. Some, I know, would say to you unhesitatingly, 'Never mind the consequences, be strictly honest;' but such advice is generally given by those above the chance of suffering from it. The fact is, Allan, it is easy enough to preach a high morality when it does not affect one's personal interests. . . . Besides, to follow such advice would mean martyrdom——"

"Absolutely—and beggary."

"Yes, and beggary. I have been in Rushington now for many years, and, with the one bright exception of Mr. Ingerson, all the business men I have met have told me positively that it is utterly impossible to embody Christian ideals in business life."

Allan looked up relieved. Such a statement, from such a source, was a wonderful ease to his mind.

"And now you have come to the same conclusion."

"Yes, it amounts to that."

"All I can say then, Allan, is that it will be your wisdom when hard pushed to give in. But, mark you, only under protest and compulsion and with the prayer of Naaman on your lips, 'In this thing the Lord pardon

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Thy servant, that when my master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the House of Rimmon; when I bow myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon Thy servant in this thing.' I really see nothing else for it, Allan; otherwise there would scarcely be a Christian man left in modern commercial life. . . . But, there goes the door-bell. The ladies have returned."

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XXVI

KIT FRANKLY TELLS ALLAN OF HER ANXIETY

IT was a lovely morning in the early spring, the season of the year when Bridston shows at its best. The hedges and trees were just bursting into leaf again after the long, dark days of winter, the fresh green of their young and tender leaves looking particularly clean and bright after their washing by the night's rain.

Kit Wallworth was early awake and out into the still, clear air of morning. Kit had always been an early riser, and, in the light mornings, it was nothing unusual for her to be astir before even the servants were awake and away through the dewy meadows enjoying the delights of the balmy morning or spinning through the country lanes on her bicycle. She used to say that it was a sin and a shame to lie abed when the birds were awake and filling all the echoing air of morning with their matins and the hum of insect life fell pleasantly upon the ear. And yet Kit had no wish that others of the household should rise with her. A true child of Nature, she loved it in all its varying moods and phases, but loved it best when she and Nature were alone. The quiet morning hours were always full of inspiration to her and precious above all things. They made life full

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and joyous for her, and she would not have missed those quiet, morning hours for worlds.

But this morning Kit did not take her way through the meadows nor did she mount her cycle. With her writing-case under her arm she made her way to the pretty little summer-house at the foot of the lawn and sat down wearily on the rustic seat. Truth to tell, Kit was troubled and anxious. She had scarcely slept all night through. She had been thinking of Allan Jepson. For weeks she had not seen him, but she had heard constantly of him from Jake, and what she had heard troubled her sorely. Allan was changing. When she had first met him on that Sunday morning nearly three years ago, he was an open-faced, clear-eyed, guileless youth; but he had travelled far since then. She had loved him for his innocency and simple-heartedness. He was so unlike other young men with whom she had come into contact. He had not been spoiled by city life. There was no affectation about him at that time or any pretence of being what he was not. He was so free from the mannerisms and silly conceits of most city-bred young swells whom she had met at one time or another, and was in every way so different, that her heart had warmed towards him instantly, and she felt it both purifying and refreshing to look into his face and listen to his talk.

But city life was making its mark upon him, and he was not now the Allan Jepson she had loved at a glance. She loved him still, loved him how intensely no one could know but herself, but had he been as he now was,

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when she first met him, she could never have been drawn out towards him as she had been.

She opened her writing-case and placed it on the little, round table in front of her, unscrewed the brass lid of the tiny ink-pot, and began to write:

"DEAR ALLAN:—When are we to see you again? You have forsaken us altogether of late. What have we done that you should treat us so? Have we called you names, or stoned you, or—or what? I am afraid, however, the fault is not ours, but yours, yours, Allan. To be plain, sir, since you went 'on the road' you have become a slave to money-grabbing and think of nothing and nobody but your own sweet self and your own selfish interests.

"There! it is down, and what is written is written. I didn't intend to state it so bluntly, but I am not gifted at hiding my mind, and as you know, am likely to say straight out all that is uppermost in my thoughts. Well, I am not going to alter it now, and, if I hadn't written it, I was thinking it. Besides, Allan, it is really time someone told you of your folly, for that is just what it is—folly, downright folly. You know I am not a little bit religious, and not at all good, but of late I sometimes wish I were. Then I should preach you such a sermon from one of your father's texts that you would pause instantly in your folly and tremble in your shoes. Shall I whisper the text in your ear? Here it is then,—'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

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"Do not think that I am joking. I am in no joking mood and am very serious indeed this morning. If you could only see me just now with my pale, solemn face, sitting here in this arbour writing to you while all the others are in bed asleep, you wouldn't think me joking. I am truly concerned for you, Allan; I am afraid you are going the way of all flesh—I mean all flesh commercial. No, not all flesh; thank goodness, everyone in commercial circles isn't bitten with the money-grabbing spirit as you appear to be. There are some who think a 'little with contentment is great gain,'—there, I am breaking out into Scripture again, but you know my Methodist training has filled me 'chock full' of proof texts, so that I am a match for you any time in argument. Dear me, dear me, how I do run on! I am trying with all my might to be as serious as ever I can, but I am afraid I am trifling too much. But, Allan, I really am serious, far more serious than my written words imply, and I want you to believe me so.

"Jake tells me that you are making 'a pot of money' and that, what with your salary and commission, you are already on the high road to affluency. Congratulations! No one, least of all Kit Wallworth, will grumble at you making as much money as you can in a legitimate way, in legitimate business, so long as it doesn't absorb all your time and interest. But, Allan, dear,—there again! I am afraid I am giving myself away, but that word slipped unintentionally from my pen in my earnestness for your welfare. What I was going to say was just this—well, no; I won't say it; I will just leave

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you to guess it; only, Allan, don't lose your manliness and your soul for the sake of gold.

"Funny for Kit Wallworth to preach thus to you? So unlike her? Ah! Allan, that is because you don't know Kit Wallworth—I mean you don't know her really and truly—but she knows you, Allan, knows you inside out and outside in, and she is dreadfully fearful lest you should make 'shipwreck of faith' just for the sake of filthy lucre. Kit wishes you to remain pure and simple free-hearted and good as you were when she first met you on that bright Sabbath morning when you first visited Bridston, and she shudders lest the dry-rot of commercialism, which at the present moment is eating away the sap and fibre, the gentleness and goodness of half the commercial men in Rushington, should also attack you.

"Do tell me when you are coming again to see us in Bridston. It seems ages since you were here. You would be all the better for a visit to us, far more light-hearted and heaps and heaps richer, in mind and spirit at any rate, by spending a little time with us here. A little leisure and playtime are good for all men, even for Allan Jepson, and I am sure he is sorely needing it. Just think of Bottomley! Jake tells me Bottomley never takes a holiday—he has grown too mean and selfish to do so; talks about things going to rack and ruin if he were only absent for one day from the warehouse, and a lot more such twaddle. He wouldn't be missed, poor deluded man, if he left the warehouse to-morrow and never returned again. A hole made by the hand in a bucket of water soon fills up again and the normal is in-

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stantly resumed. Jake tells me that Saturday afternoons and the blessed Sabbath are black days to Bottomley, and that he lives through them with impatience and ill-humour for Monday morning to come, so that he may get back again to his money-making and his percentages. It is a terrible state to live in, a profoundly miserable state. For goodness' sake, Allan, don't you grow like that or I shall hate you,—no, I could never hate you, Allan, but I should grieve bitterly for you. When you come here, young man, we shall not listen to a word that you may have to say in regard to business, and we are going to have a jolly time. When are you coming? Could you come on Saturday afternoon next? I have a beautiful little plan in my little noddle for making you forget, for a time at least, all your business worries, while we shall be as merry as crickets on the hearth."

Kit laid down her pen at this point and thought a while.

"If I only dared tell him!" she mused. "If I only dared!" and she blushed with maidenly modesty at the thought. "But he knows it, he knows it; he must know it; he cannot but know it. He must have found it out long ago, for I betray myself constantly when in his presence."

She got up and walked out into the garden.

"He wouldn't be a man if he didn't know it. . . . My eyes, my face, my whole bearing towards him must have discovered it to him over and over again. . . . Words have not been necessary to say, "I love you,

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Allan, dear Allan, with all my heart and soul, and with all my strength and might.'"

Even though the confession was to herself alone, her blood was mantling to her cheeks and tingling through her veins at the shame of it. But for Allan's sake she was growing reckless. She loved him so well that his salvation from the peril that threatened him was more to her than all her modesty and maidenly reserve.

A sudden thought thrilled her. She would tell him of her love. She would make a clean breast of all that was in her heart towards him. It would be unmaidenly, but she would do it. She would do it for his sake; there was no other way of claiming her right to win him from the narrowing lust that was ruining him.

And yet, when she had come to this decision, she was frightened. It was truly unmaidenly and a thing from which she would have shrunk with horror at any other time, but she would not falter in her purpose. Her love for Allan was great enough to enable her to endure even shame for his sake. And, after all, what were her shame to his ruin! She could live down her shame, but Allan's ruin would be a thing irretrievable. She was prepared to suffer anything for his sake.

She re-entered the arbour and took up her pen again. She was not frightened now. Her decision had been taken, and her heart was swelling with its great purpose.

But, was it well to tell Allan in cold black and white of her love? Would it not be better to wait until he came to Bridston, lured by her letter, and then to tell him face to face? It would be the greater ordeal; but

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she would go through with it and would not falter. All the future depended upon her courage. So she closed her letter, sealed the envelope, and then went down the sweet-smelling lane to the pillar-box to post it.

The letter had hardly fallen from her hand into the cavernous red jaws of the pillar-box when another thought came to her, a thought that, for the moment, chilled her blood and blanched her cheek. Perhaps Allan loved another? She did not know, she could not tell what attachments Allan might have formed in other places. She knew nothing of his friends. He had been coming to Bridston now, at irregular intervals for three years or more and she had learned to love him passionately, but now that she considered it, Allan had been reticent in regard to his personal matters. Yet it was scarcely by design. It was probably the outcome of her own behaviour. She had left him no leisure to talk of himself and had occupied all his attention with paying court to her. But would he have paid court to her had there been another? No, no, no; Allan Jepson was not deceitful,—there *was* no other.

Edith? The thought was absurd. She would have discovered it long ago had Allan loved Edith. There *was* no other, and Edith was to Allan simply the daughter of his good friend, the minister,—that was all, that was all.

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XXVII

ALLAN DETERMINES ON SPECULATION

ALLAN was at breakfast in his "diggings" when Kit's letter arrived. Slitting open the envelope at once with a table-knife, he read the letter through, read it hurriedly and delightedly, and laughed aloud at its audacity. "It is just like Kit," was his verdict when he came to the end of it, and he laughed again.

Even for so outspoken a young lady as Kit Wallworth, the letter was a most remarkable one and an unusual one, but, for all that, Allan was not surprised at its contents. He had long ceased being surprised at anything Kit Wallworth said or did, for, to use one of her own felicitous expressions, she was always "breaking out in fresh places." And this latest outbreak was a delightful one to Allan and he enjoyed the raillery, the sauciness, and the preachiness of the letter immensely.

"The little puss, the dear little puss!" he exclaimed, and laughed till the tears trickled down his cheeks. Before he had completed his breakfast he had determined to accept Kit's invitation to run out to Bridston to spend the evening with her.

"Let me see," he mused, "it is Saturday she suggests?"

He took up the letter and read it again, this time more

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slowly and carefully, becoming conscious this time of a deeper feeling and a more serious tone running through the words and underlying them than he had at first perceived. "The girl is dreadfully in earnest," he said; "what has taken hold of her? It is so unlike Kit. Is Kit also among the prophets?" His determination to visit Kit weakened considerably. Of all persons in the world he did not wish to see Kit serious. Seriousness did not become Kit. Her part in life was to laugh, and, if she were now about to change her rôle, well,—and Allan shrugged his shoulders.

An hour afterwards he was in the city and absorbed in commercial concerns. Kit and her letter were forgotten, and his whole mind was given up to his daily toil. And yet "toil" is scarcely the word to use, for Allan's work was no toil to him. It was a fascination. Something of the fever that had seized upon Hugh Bottomley in his haste to be rich had got into Allan's blood, and all other interests in life were lost in the pursuit of this. For Allan was determined to be rich, and all his energies were being strained to that end. Morning, noon, and night he was engaged in either swelling his percentages or in devising schemes for swelling them. He scarcely slept at night for thinking of them, and, when perforce he did fall asleep, it was only to dream of money-making. Sometimes, it was true, an old memory held him in check awhile; sometimes his father's words, "Keep your heart free, my lad, from the narrowing lust of gold," came back to him; sometimes, indeed, his old and better self returned to him and his con-

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science plagued him; but he always brushed aside these kind influences by, "The Lord pardon Thy servant in this thing." Had Allan at this time not been so wholly absorbed in buying and selling and getting gain he might have discovered more in Kit's letter than appeared on the surface. But he was blind to it. The overmastering passion for gold that had taken hold of him was dulling all his other senses. He had eyes for nothing but commercial prosperity, and all his finer feelings were being gradually destroyed. A year ago he would have been quick to detect the love of a sensitive woman, trying to hide itself like a blushing flower, in every line of Kit's letter. But not now. The gold fever was in his blood and had obscured his vision.

Meantime, Kit was waiting anxiously for some reply to her letter, but the night closed in without bringing her any answer. Next morning she was up early meeting the postman. But he had nothing for her. Another day passed, and another, and another. A week and more slipped away and Allan gave no sign. Kit grew sick at heart. She began to imagine all kinds of things to account for Allan's silence. He was vexed. He resented her interference, and, particularly, the straightforward talk she had given him. She hoped his silence might mean nothing more than this. But perhaps he had discovered her secret?—the secret which she had herself resolved to tell him? The thought made her cheeks burn with shame, for, ah! it was a different thing altogether to make confession of love openly and of set purpose to having it discovered by the very one for whose

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ears alone it was intended, especially since it now appeared that he was indifferent to it and slighted it. If Allan had indeed discovered her secret she would never, never be able to look him in the face again; she would never be able to meet him on equal terms; and the old freedom and friendship between them were over for ever. Alas! that she had acted so imprudently, for it were better to go on living on the old terms, simple friendship that it was, than to put a barrier between them.

But Allan could not have discovered her secret; no, no, no. That were impossible. She tried to recall the letter she had written to him, line by line; she could remember nothing that would lead him to discover her love for him. There were hints,—yes, perhaps, there were hints, but nothing more; and, on the face of them, even these were only expressive of her deep concern for his welfare. How glad she now was that she had not set down her love in black and white as her heart had at first prompted her to do! She had been mercifully preserved from that folly, and now a great thankfulness filled her heart.

As the days wore on and Allan's silence continued, the assurance Kit gathered from these reflections gradually gave place to doubtings, and she began to dread lest Allan should answer. But she need not have feared. Amidst a heap of other loose papers her letter lay hidden in the depths of Allan's pocket, utterly forgotten by him. Allan's brain was now busy with other projects. Since his appointment to Hugh Bottomley's old position he had more than commanded Hugh's success, and he

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was making money freely. The fever of his success had got into his blood and gold-getting filled all his thoughts. His savings were rapidly accumulating. Week by week he added to them considerably and totalled them up in his bank-book with intense satisfaction. They had long since reached three figures and were nearing four. The thought occurred to Allan that he could do better with his money than by simply letting it lie at interest in the bank. That was a childish way of dealing with money and a slow way of increasing it. No true business man would be content with such a lame method. A true business man would invest, speculate; he would do anything that would make the money double itself as quickly as possible, and he would go on investing and speculating so that his hoard might grow.

Allan determined to do the same. He would speculate. He would enter upon some great financial hazard and put his money to some worthy risk. Only in that way could he hope to increase it rapidly, only by the carrying out of some such great scheme of daring could he hope to grow rich. Indeed such a course was inevitable if he were to accomplish the ends he had in view. Great fortunes were not built up by honest labour and simple saving alone. Investment, speculation, the taking of daring hazards were the paths to affluence.

Kit was right when she said that Allan was changing; she would have been still more correct if she had said he had changed. Three years ago, when Allan first came to Rushington, he shrunk from the bare thought of speculating. For him the word always had a sinister

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meaning and suggested only gambling and fraud. But he had no qualms of conscience now. That accommodating monitor had come round to his view of things and was also changed. Indeed Allan had travelled so far since his advent into commercial life that, apart from downright, open fraud, he was prepared to sanction almost anything and would have defended the word "speculation" with heat from such imputations as he himself once cast upon it. Speculation was simply a legitimate business and was practised every day in the week by all business houses and commercial men. Indeed, without it no commerce could be carried on, and the foundations of barter and exchange would give way altogether. Within proper limits, and certain well-defined restrictions, speculation was necessary, honourable, and above reproach.

In this frame of mind, Allan was rushing through Lombard Street when his eye was attracted by a printed slip of paper newly pasted on the door of one of the buildings. A printed slip of paper with the name was not an unusual thing in Lombard Street where so many speculators carry on their business and where so many changes are constantly taking place, but it was this particular name which caught Allan's eye. In bold, red type on a white ground this is what he read:

CHARLES FAIRCLOUGH,
Financial Agent,
No. 3, ON TOP FLOOR.

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Allan stood speechless, staring at the words. Could it possibly be his old friend, Charlie? A moment's consideration convinced him that it could be no other than he, and Allan at once began to mount the stairs to the floor indicated.

He had no difficulty in finding the office, for, of five offices on the top floor, it was the only one tenanted. But he did not succeed in effecting an entrance, for a notice on the door, in Charlie's well-known caligraphy, informed all whom it concerned that the proprietor was "Out, but would return at three o'clock," and Allan had perforce to retrace his steps.

But Charlie Faircough a financial agent! What did that mean? And how had Charlie come to set up in that business of all others? Allan was filled with curiosity. Since Charlie had left the firm, Allan had not once met him. Several times he had heard of his being here or there, but he had never been able to meet him. Charlie seemed to have cut himself off altogether from his old friends. At any rate no one seemed to know anything about him, how he was living, or what he was doing. But now that he had run him to earth, Allan was determined to solve the mystery of Charlie's life, and, at the same time, to satisfy his curiosity. So when he got home that night, Allan wrote a letter to Charlie informing him that he had called that day at his office, and making an appointment for the morrow.

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XXVIII

CHARLIE FAIRCLOUGH'S ADVICE REJECTED

FAIRCLOUGH found Allan's letter next morning amongst several others in his letter-box and pounced on it at once.

"Allan Jepson's fist or I am a Dutchman!" he exclaimed, and read it through at a glance.

A strange smile came over his face as he folded the letter up again and put it into his pocket. "Lucky that I was out," he said, and his eye swept the room.

He might well have thought that for, had Allan Jepson entered that office, his desire to renew Fairclough's acquaintance would certainly have received a severe shock. Not an article of furniture was in the room, not even a chair, and no sign, save the letters Fairclough just then held in his hand, of any business being transacted. The truth was, the office was merely a convenience for the reception of letters, which came in shoals every week in answer to a few specious advertisements inserted in the newspapers. Driven to want and penury by the loss of his situation, Fairclough for a long time managed to live by his wits; but, of late, he had developed into the regular bookmaker, a profession which he euphemistically described by the high-sounding title of financial agent.

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"Lucky that I was out," he repeated. "Allan Jepson must not come here." He stood thinking a moment. "I will meet him at White's," he decided, and, after glancing through his other letters, went out to wire to Allan.

Allan received the wire with surprise, but, at the appointed time, made his way to White's café.

On the road he met Jake Wallworth.

"Say old boy," said Jake, "what has come over you?"

"What do you mean, Jake?"

"Have you forgotten in what direction Bridston lies?"

"Oh, I will be running over one of these days, Jake. How are they all?"

"When?" asked Jake, ignoring the question.

"Let me see,—perhaps, Saturday."

"Fix a time."

"Cannot. But you may expect me all being well."

"That is a promise?"

"Yes,—a promise. On conditions, you know."

Allan added the qualifying word suddenly and with hot face. Kit's letter was in his pocket and seemed to be burning a hole through his coat. He had forgotten all about it until that moment.

"What conditions, Allan?"

He hesitated a moment and then said, "That I am not away on my rounds."

"Are you likely to be?"

"I don't know. I can't say. One never knows what may happen. You know yourself, Jake, a man in my position often has to run away at a moment's notice."

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"Oh, well," said Jake, "if you are away, of course it is a different matter. But if you are not——"

"I shall be with you on Saturday."

"Then that is settled?"

"Yes."

Allan met Fairclough at White's café a little time afterwards and the two old friends renewed their friendship.

"You are still going up, Allan, I hear," said Charlie.

"Just a little," agreed Allan, well-pleased with the compliment implied in Charlie's tone.

"A little! Why, I understand, you are on the best ground now?"

"Yes, that is so."

"That, in fact, you are number one amongst the firm's travellers?"

"Yes."

"And that means success?"

Allan laughed.

"And money—heaps of it?"

Allan laughed again, heartily this time. "I make a little," he said, and Fairclough joined good-humouredly in Allan's laughter.

"But to business, Charlie."

"Yes, to business, by all means. That's you again, Allan,—business, business, business."

"Tell me what you mean, Charlie, by calling yourself a financial agent."

Charlie winked his eye and put his fore-finger on the side of his nose.

"Can't you guess?" he asked.

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"Book-making?"

"A little."

"Speculation?"

"Also a little."

"On your own account?"

"And on others'."

"That is what I am wanting to get at. Now, look here, Charlie, I am coming to you as a client. I want your advice. I want you to advise me as to one or two good speculations in which I might risk a few hundreds."

Charlie thought a moment.

"You take me, Charlie?"

Charlie said he did. But, at the same time, he thought Allan knew sufficient of what was going on without coming to him.

"But I must go to someone, Charlie. If it got to the firm's ears that I was speculating, well—well, I need not explain; you understand. My name, for obvious reasons, must not appear; at least, not for the present. There may come a day when I shan't mind if things turn out all right. And if things do turn out all right why then, Charlie, it will be the making of both of us, for this thing must be for our mutual good. You quite understand? Now, what can you do for me, Charlie?"

Charlie Fairclough had travelled a long way on the down grade since leaving the warehouse, and, had Allan been an unknown client coming to him in the ordinary way of business, he would not have hesitated to accept any responsibility asked of him and would have pro-

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ceeded at once to fleece the poor dupe accordingly. But Allan Jepson was different. He could not so treat him. He remembered Allan coming first from the country into city life with pure intent and lawful ambition to get on in the world; he remembered how Allan had shrunk from everything whatever of a questionable character; how all the fellows in the office had respected Allan for his uprightness; and now here before him stood this self-same Allan Jepson, this once stainless youth, anxious to embark upon the troublous and treacherous waters of speculation. If he had travelled far since coming to Rushington so had Allan Jepson, but he, Fairclough, had not travelled sufficiently far enough to be able to view Allan's intentions with equanimity. His heart smote him as he looked into his old friend's face and he determined to make an effort to save him.

"Jepson," he said impressively, "you come to me for advice?"

"Yes."

"Because I am an old friend?"

"Yes."

"Will you act upon my advice?"

"I am here for that purpose."

"Very well; this is my advice and go where you will you will get no better—Don't speculate."

Allan looked amazed.

"Give up the idea, Jepson, give it up at once. I know what I am talking about. Speculation spells ruin."

"And success—and riches," answered Allan.

Fairclough shook his head.

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"If not, how then do men grow rich, fabulously rich?" demanded Allan.

"Some by questionable methods," said Fairclough, shrugging his shoulders. "But you, Jepson, would not wish to grow rich by such methods?"

The shaft reached Allan's conscience, but glanced off again without penetrating it.

"Speculation is not a questionable method," he said. "It is practised every day of the week by almost all men who command great success or by those who are aiming at it. There is no use burking the fact, Charlie, it is the common practice, for fortunes are not made by what is called legitimate business. . . . Questionable methods? I have long since, I hope, got over that foolish idea, and, by hook or by crook, I mean to succeed. Besides, it does not do in these days to have too fine a conscience. That, too, is a fact, Charlie, and I know what I am talking about. And you know it also."

Fairclough raised his brows in amazement. Allan Jepson had developed with a vengeance.

"Then you reject my advice, Allan?"

"Y—yes, if you tell me not to speculate. On that subject I have made up my mind and I mean to hazard a few hundreds. The only question at present between us is, Will you act for me?"

"You can trust me, then?"

"Completely."

Fairclough's face flushed with pleasure.

"Yet no one else trusts me, Jepson," he said. "That is a solid fact. The people who come to me in the way

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of business come expecting to be duped, yet lured by the chances offered them. And, believe me, Jepson, the chances are one in a hundred; one in a thousand, oftentimes; but yet they come. And why? Because they are bitten as you are now by the idea of immense gains. But it is a delusion, a delusion."

"You don't draw a very bright picture, Charlie."

"I cannot; I dare not—to you."

"And it is unnecessary. No talk whatever will dissuade me. I am resolved. I ask you once again, Will you act for me?"

For just one moment Fairclough hesitated. There was no need of further words; if Jepson were determined to go headlong to ruin he could not prevent him. But, at least, he could keep him from being fleeced by dishonest agents.

"You are sure you can trust me, Jepson?" he asked once more.

Allan affected annoyance. "I should not have come to you unless I knew I could."

"But after what I have told you?"

"You have told me nothing to destroy my confidence in you."

Fairclough held out his hand and Allan grasped it warmly.

"Thank you, Jepson. I will do anything you wish, and act for you as if I were speculating with my own."

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XXIX

KIT ACCEPTS THE INEVITABLE

SATURDAY came, and, true to his promise, Allan went over to Bridston to see the Wallworths. But it was with no light heart that he went. Since meeting Jake in the early part of the week, Allan had been preparing himself for the meeting with Kit, and he had flattered himself by thinking that he was strong to meet her, but it was with a strange sinking of heart that he came upon her standing at the gate of the Wallworths' mansion.

Kit, on the other hand, was radiant at his coming and voluble in her greetings, all the reserve which she had determined on breaking down instantly at the sight of the man she loved. Allan thought he had never seen her looking better. She was as lovely as a queen and as beautiful as a fairy princess.

"You got my letter, Allan?" she asked shyly, after a little preliminary skirmishing.

"Yes."

Just that one word and no more for answer. Kit observed it and thought it strange.

"Well?" she queried, looking up into Allan's face.

He answered her look of enquiry by one of confusion.

"Is that all you have got to say, Allan?"

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"What more would you have me say?"

Kit felt that something was annoying him though she did not know what.

"Did my letter offend you, Allan?" she asked pointedly.

"No," he answered. But there was no heartiness in his denial. Kit searched his face closely and her conviction that something was troubling him was strengthened.

"You don't seem yourself to-day, Allan," she said, going strainght to the point, as was her wont.

At that he pulled himself together instantly. "Why, what put that into your head?" he asked.

"Your manner," she replied, "You are as solemn-looking as an owl," and she laughed merrily. "But really and truly," she said, putting her hand on Allan's arm, "what is the matter with you, Allan?"

The touch of her hand thrilled him through and through and rendered him almost helpless. He could not in cold blood tell this girl all he intended. He could not act so cruelly, so unfeelingly.

"What is the matter, Allan?" she repeated with soothing sympathy, her face filled with womanly pity.

"Nothing, Kit, nothing."

She looked at him for a moment fixedly. "You are quite sure that my letter is not the cause of your mood to-day?"

That was a staggerer. Allan felt like a man reeling under a powerful blow.

"My mood!" he exclaimed evasively.

"The lecturing I gave you has offended you?"

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"Not in the least," he said prevaricating, and laughed at his answer.

"You knew you deserved it?"

"Yes."

"What! you admit that?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am relieved to hear you acknowledge it. There is hope for you yet."

Allan laughed outright at this. He had come to Bridston with the determination to make things plain, but his resolution was weakening considerably.

By this time they had arrived at the foot of the wide steps which led up to the great hall door. Suddenly Kit came to a stand-still.

"Shall we go in or not?" she asked in a tone which implied that she wished a negative answer.

"Not if you don't wish it," he said.

"What do you wish?"

"To please you."

"Very well, we will not go in, not just yet at any rate," and they turned and went towards the arbour.

"Mary is at home again," said Kit as they went along.

"When did she come?"

"This morning."

"Just for a holiday?"

"Yes, that is all."

"And when does she go out to Ceylon?"

"In about a month's time from now. She has finished her course of training."

The end of this dialogue arrived at there was silence

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between them for a full minute. Then Kit tried again to interest Allan.

"You have heard of Edward's success?"

"No?"

"He has got through his final."

"Capital! He will now be called to the bar?"

"Yes, we are hoping so."

"He has done very well."

"Very."

Dead silence again until they reached the arbour. There Kit instantly brushed aside all other issues and went straight to the point of the matter uppermost in her mind and nearest her heart.

"It was here, Allan, that I wrote your letter."

"Yes."

"On this table."

"Yes."

"Yes—yes. Try again, Allan, try again. Do you know, sir, that I could not sleep for thinking about you and had to get up out of bed just after sunrise and come out here to relieve my feelings with pen, ink, and paper?"

"It was very good of you."

Kit stared at him in blank amazement. He was provokingly cool.

"Very good of me! Is there another in the whole world would have done it?"

Her face was flushed and her bosom swelling. Allan felt that she was leading him dangerously near to the confession which he wished to avoid hearing. He grew hot all over and then stone cold. She had led him into

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the arbour, he felt, to carry out the logical sequence of her letter. He stood looking into her glistening eyes as one paralysed. He did not know what to do or say and would have given almost anything to escape from her presence. But, above all his other feelings, he felt that Kit must not be allowed to confess. It would be a lasting shame to her to think of it afterwards. He felt that he must save her from herself.

"Another! Yes, there is another," he said with cruel calmness.

"Not a woman?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean—your mother," and Kit's breath came thick and fast.

"I was thinking of Edith——"

"Ed—ith—!"

"Edith Calvert."

Kit's face paled instantly and a look of agony came into her eyes.

As for Allan, he could not speak another word, and stood regarding her with pity. He had stabbed her to the heart—she was even then staggering under the cruel blow. He could not add to her pain by opening his lips to say another word.

A full minute passed before either spoke, but it seemed like an age to each of them. In its effect it was truly an age to Kit, for in that minute she cast off her old self for ever and became another woman.

"Let us go inside," she said with forced calmness, and Allan saw that she had accepted the inevitable.

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XXX

SUCCESS MAKES ALLAN RECKLESS

SOME few weeks afterwards, when the Rushington express arrived at Bristol, the guard of the train, accompanied by a messenger from the post-office, went down the long line of carriages asking at every window, "Anyone of the name of Jepson here?"

At length they reached the carriage in which Allan was sitting alone, busily writing out his latest orders.

"Anyone of the name of Jepson?" cried the guard.

Allan looked up from his writing. "That is my name," he said.

"Mr. Allan Jepson?"

Yes."

Messenger here has a telegram for you, sir," said the guard, touching his hat.

Allan tore open the envelope hastily. Who could be wiring to him in that manner? A single glance at the telegram made him master of its contents and sent the blood tingling to his face with delight.

"Great, good news, sir?" ventured the guard, observing him.

"Yes—good news, indeed," answered Allan.

"Any reply, sir?" asked the messenger.

"No—but stay," and he gave the messenger boy a

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shilling and sent him away chuckling with pleasure, saying to himself as he went, "Something like a gentlman, that." Then, noticing that the guard did not move away from the carriage-door, Allan gave the man half a crown, and, a few minutes afterwards, the train steamed out of the station again.

The telegram was from Charlie Fairclough and its message was that Allan's speculation had turned out a huge success. Fairclough merely mentioned the bare fact in his message, and asked Allan to call upon him immediately on arriving at Rushington.

Allan's excitement knew no bounds. He could not sit still. He got up and walked about the carriage in a very frenzy of excitement. For, what did this success mean? That his usual luck was following him into new spheres of money-making, and that even his wildest dreams could not picture for him all that he might yet accomplish by speculation.

And what was the measure of his success? That question set him dreaming. Fairclough, he told himself, would not have troubled to wire if the success had been a small one. For Fairclough knew all about his movements, where he was each day, and both the hour and the day of his return to the city. Of course Charlie could have come to the station to meet him wthout sending any message. But Charlie was 'cute—'cute. He did not want people to see them together, and he wished to communicate to him the exact details of his success in private. That seemed to Allan to suggest the character of the success—it was complete, stupendous!

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How slow the train crawled! An express! A double express, rushing through the country at one hundred and twenty miles an hour, would have seemed slow to Allan's thinking just then. He wanted to land in Rushington at once. His impatience was outflying the fastest train. "At any rate," he said to himself with great satisfaction as he dropped into his seat again, "the one, big, outstanding fact is that I have succeeded, and what I have done once I can do again and again—a hundred times again."

At length the train reached Rushington. Allan was the first passenger to alight. His Gladstone-bag was in his hand, but all his skips were in the luggage-van.

A porter came running towards him.

"Luggage, sir?"

"Yes, in the van."

"Name?"

"Jepson. Get them out and send them by the carrier to this address," handing the porter his card, and giving him a piece of silver for his trouble.

"Cab, sir? . . . Cab, sir? . . . Hansom?" a score of voices called out to him.

"Yes, quick!"

He flung his bag into a hansom and jumped in after it.

"Where to, sir?" asked cabby, looking down through the little trap.

"Lombard Street."

"Number?"

"Oh, hang the number! Drive away!"

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"Which end of Lombard Street?"

"Slater Street end. Second building on the right."

"Financial Buildings," said the driver, and whipped up his horse.

Ten minutes afterwards, Allan was closeted with Charlie Fairclough in his bare office, not now so bare as it was the last time the two had met together there, and was soon in earnest conversation with him.

"So the affair has turned out all right, Charlie?" he cried excitedly.

"Yes, all right—very successfully indeed. Let me congratulate you, Allan."

"And let me congratulate you, Charlie. You are a prince of financiers."

Fairclough smiled faintly. Allan had misunderstood his congratulations. His thought was not so much of the success of Allan's speculation as of the safety of the money hazarded. For Fairclough was not deceived as to what might have been. He had undertaken Allan's commission in no light mood and with the best of intentions—of keeping him from being fleeced by others. But he knew that the speculation had only succeeded at all because the risks incurred were as nothing. The fact was he had not speculated in the true sense of the word with Allan's money; he had simply lent the money at a big percentage to another speculator who had needed ready money, with the result that Allan's money had almost doubled itself. The only answer, however, that he made to Allan's compliment just then was to produce a pocket-book from which he counted out some bank-

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notes; and then, from his pocket he drew a small bag filled with gold, which he gave into Allan's hand, saying at the same time what the notes and the gold came to.

Allan stood speechless a moment or two with astonishment, but, recovering himself, exclaimed, "So much as that, Charlie!"

Fairclough nodded.

"Immense! Stupendous!" Allan cried. "Why, Charlie, you are in very deed a prince of financiers, and I named you well a moment ago. . . . But your commission, Charlie?"

Fairclough shook his head. He was badly in need of money just then, but he had made up his mind not to take one farthing from Allan.

"What do you mean, Charlie?" asked Allan marvelling.

"Not a cent, Allan, not a cent."

"Not a cent! But I insist. Say, five per cent.?"

But still Fairclough shook his head.

"I have acted for you in this matter as a friend, Allan."

"But even friends cannot work for nothing! And I object very strongly, Charlie, to allow you to do so. You must benefit by my success. That was the condition. It was to be a mutual affair this. And, of course, there is the future to be thought of, too, for you are the only agent, Charlie, I shall ever employ."

"Allan," said Fairclough, "let me caution you——"

"Caution!" and Allan laughed.

"You cannot hope for every transaction to turn out so successfully as this."

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"Certainly not, certainly not. There will be losses sometimes."

"Almost every time. This affair now is exceptional. . . . Yes, believe me, Allan, I know what I am talking about; success at any time is exceptional in speculation, and the usual end of all speculation is loss and ruin."

Allan laughed merrily. He had never seen Charlie so serious before, and it seemed to him as a great joke.

"Well," he said, "we will talk about the loss and ruin at some future time. It will be quite time enough when they come. Meantime, I am going in hot and heavy for speculation. What is there to fear with such luck as mine, and with such an agent as you, Charlie?"

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XXXI

SISTER MARION RECEIVES A VISITOR

THE noon-day service at the Historic Hall was over and the people were streaming away through the many exits of the vast building. Most of them were business men who had turned into the service for an hour's relaxation in the midst of their strenuous life, and they now seemed anxious to get back to their offices again. But none of them were going back as they came, and all had been benefited and blessed.

A good sprinkling of the congregation had represented the domestic hearth,—mothers and daughters, come to the city to shop, but managing to rob an hour from the time devoted to that interesting duty to get to the mid-day spiritual meal. A pleasing feature of the gathering had been the large number of city clerks present, particularly young clerks, and it was encouraging to all the workers at the Historic Hall to see them there, and to feel that the mid-day service was reaching the young fellows who were destined to be the future leaders of commerce and the merchant princes in Rushington.

As Sister Marion hurried through one of the long corridors on her way to her room, someone touched her on the arm.

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She stopped instantly and turned to face the person who had touched her,—a young lady as it proved.

"Is it Sister Marion?"

"Yes."

"May I have a few minutes' talk with you in private?" handing Sister Marion her card.

One glance at the card was sufficient to ensure the required answer.

"Yes, with pleasure. Will you come this way?"

It was a cosy little room into which the Sister led her visitor. The walls were hung with pictures of a superior sort and the small over-mantle was decked with knick-knacks in ware and brass-work, photographs of ministers and of the personal friends of the Sister. A little table stood in the window-recess and on it rested a well-stocked work-basket, some unfinished crewel work, and other similar things, as if to testify that Sister Marion could turn at times from her absorbing work of rescuing the perishing to the lighter work of the needle. In the centre of the room an octagonal bamboo table was ready for tea, and Sister Marion now set a light to the tiny gas-stove under the little kettle.

"I am delighted to see you, Miss Wallworth," said the Sister, taking off her bonnet. "You will do me the honour to drink a cup of tea with me? That's right; and we can talk over our 'cups,'" and she laughed merrily.

Kit took off her gloves and sat down to the table. She had come to have a "serious" talk with Sister Marion, and was greatly relieved to find the Sister making things so easy for her. But it was no easy matter to

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begin, and a score of passing events were commented upon and dismissed before the real object of the visit was broached.

By that time the little kettle was sending forth a cloud of steam, and Sister Marion "wet" the tea.

"And now to business," said the Sister, handing Kit a cup of tea and pouring out one for herself. "You have come to tell me something?"

"And to seek your advice."

Sister Marion glanced across the table at Kit with interest. It was her lot to have her advice sought by many and to be made their confidante, but it was an unusual thing for such a person as Miss Wallworth to seek her advice and she was somewhat puzzled. For the most part those who came to her were young girls in misfortune, either through their own act or through that of others; girls thrown on the streets by loss of their situation and afraid to go back to their homes in the country; girls wronged and degraded; girls run away from home, and trying to evade being discovered; but rarely, very rarely, a lady like Miss Wallworth.

Kit almost felt all that was passing through Sister Marion's mind. With woman's quick intuition she read the Sister's unspoken thoughts, and the blood rushed to her face at the shame of it. But she was none the less determined to carry her purpose through.

"And to seek your advice," she repeated, for one moment covering her confusion in her cup.

"If I can be of service to you in any way, Miss Wallworth, I shall be glad."

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"Oh! It is not for myself I am come."

"Who then?" asked Sister Marion quietly.

"It is for another I seek your advice and service. For one, Sister Marion, if I mistake not, in whom you are deeply interested. . . . Not for his sake," Kit hastened to explain, seeing at once that she had but poorly expressed herself. "Not for his sake so much as for the sake of your friend, Edith Calvert."

Sister Marion's quiet reserve vanished instantly. She was all interest and excitement now.

"Do you mean Allan Jepson?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What of him?"

"He is going to ruin as fast as he can go . . . and I want you to save him, to help in saving him——"

"Speak plainly, Miss Wallworth, speak plainly," urged Sister Marion, her eyes dilating and her breath coming in gasps.

"Allan Jepson has turned gambler——"

"Gambler!"

"Gambler, yes. But understand me. A speculator—not a common gambler."

"Speculator in stocks and shares?"

"I know not. But he is risking large sums of money in what is called speculation. He terms it legitimate business. He would defend it hotly were he here. But it is none the less true that he is a gambler, a reckless gambler, and that he is on the high road to ruin. So far his speculations have been successful, greatly so I am told. I would they had not been so. If they had

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turned out disastrous it might have proved his salvation. But his very success is making him still more reckless, and you know, Sister, and everyone knows who will not shut his eyes to the facts, that his successes are but incidents, and that the ultimate end of this madness must be what it inevitably always is."

Sister Marion sat speechless for a moment. "This is alarming news, Miss Wallworth, terribly alarming news," she said presently. "How have you learnt this?"

For just one moment Kit's face flushed scarlet. Then she replied impatiently, "What matter how I have learnt it? When a man is drowning does anyone stop to ask how the poor fellow got into the water? That is not the time to ask. The first thing to do is to save him, or to try to save him."

"You are quite right," said Sister Marion, pulling herself together, "quite right. But your news almost stunned me for the moment. Yes, we must save him. That is our business. And yet it cannot be done by just flinging out a rope as one does to a drowning man. We shall have to consider carefully the best means and we must proceed with caution."

"Oh! I have thought of all that. There is no time for consideration and there is only one way."

"And what is that?"

"Perfect openness with Allan—with Mr. Jepson, I mean."

"You would tax him with it?"

"Someone must, and without hesitancy or delay."

Sister Marion thought a moment. "The question is

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who?" she said, and then, as if talking to herself, "I am almost a perfect stranger to Mr. Jepson—I only know him through Edith."

"That is Miss Calvert?"

"Yes."

"The two are——?" But Kit could not finish the sentence. The word stuck in her throat.

"Engaged," said Sister Marion, eyeing Kit curiously, and Kit choked down her feelings. Engaged! The truth was out at last! But, though the word was a stab to Kit's heart, she affected not to feel it.

"Does Miss Calvert love Allan Jepson?" she asked.

Sister Marion started. "Why, Miss Wallworth, what a question to ask! They are engaged."

"There are many engagements without love. Does Miss Calvert love Allan Jepson?"

"Passionately—passionately."

It was another stab for Kit. Yet she played her part unflinchingly.

"Does *he* love her?"

"Why, certainly. At any rate I judge so, though——"

"Yes?" asked with urgent voice and palpitating heart.

"I have no right to utter my thoughts, for they have only come from casual observation, and . . . oh! of course he loves her. There is no doubt about it."

"Well," said Kit, with more animation now than before, "Miss Calvert is the one to tax him with his folly. You must go to her, Sister; you must tell her what I have now told you; and leave it to her."

"Yes, if she cannot win him from his folly no one can."

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"If she cannot win him," replied Kit with intense feeling, "he does not love her."

Again Sister Marion started. The intensity of her companion's feelings completely amazed her. Yet it was only the bare truth she uttered. If Allan Jepson did not listen to Edith it was proof positive that he did not love her.

"Poor Edith!" she sighed.

"And poor Allan!—poor Mr. Jepson, I mean," exclaimed Kit with vehemence.

"Yes, his is the sadder lot," agreed Sister Marion. "Do you know him, Miss Wallworth? Have you met him? When he first came to Rushington there was not a more innocent-hearted young man in the city. I met him at the Calverts', and his conversation was like a breeze from the pure air of the country. But alas! the blighting influences of city life have nipped his innocence. Oh! it is dreadful, Miss Wallworth, dreadful. And his father had such high hopes of him! Nay, he had such bright hopes himself. . . . And the Calverts, they loved him as their own. It will be a terrible blow to them. But——"

"They must save him. They must all help, and they must set about it at once. And you, too, Sister, must lend your influence——"

"And will you not also help?"

"Yes, as I am able. But I must work from the outside. I must not be brought in touch with Al—, with Mr. Jepson; it would be no use. I have no influence with him."

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XXXII

EXCITEMENT IN THE CITY

LEFT alone Sister Marion went over the whole matter carefully in her own mind, and was not long in coming to the conclusion that Miss Wallworth had set her a stupendous task, one from which anyone might well shrink and from which she herself already felt inclined to withdraw. And why had Miss Wallworth come to her? True, she was a Sister of the People, and it seemed, on the face of it, a right and proper thing to enlist her help and sympathy in such cases, but this was different from all others. Why had not Miss Wallworth herself gone to Edith Calvert and told her of Allan Jepson's gambling? Why not have gone at once to Edith? It was Edith whom Miss Wallworth wished to interest, Edith whom she protested could alone save Allan, and Edith whom she hoped to move in the matter. Why had Miss Wallworth come to her? Whence came this strong interest in Allan Jepson on Miss Wallworth's part? What was Allan to her? Sister Marion remembered now hearing that Allan had visited Bridston occasionally, but that of itself surely could not account for Miss Wallworth's concern for Allan Jepson's conduct? How came it to pass that Miss Wallworth had so easily fallen into the use of Allan's Christian name while they had been talk-

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ing together? More than once she had had to correct herself, but the correction always seemed difficult to her and the familiar use of the Christian name the natural expression. Was there some mystery in this? Was there something behind it all? Was it true that Miss Wallworth herself loved Allan Jepson, and that her interest in his conduct arose from this love? Accustomed as she was to the strange experiences her life duties often brought to her, the bare thought of such a thing in connection with these two almost stilled for the moment Sister Marion's heart. For it suggested to her an unutterable tragedy—the tragedy of the secret, silent, impossible love of a sensitive woman for a man whose troth was plighted to another.

Suddenly, as she sat thus meditating, the telephone bell broke in upon her thoughts and she at once rose and crossed the room in answer to the summons. Even as she did so the thought occurred to her that she had been left an unusually long time without anyone's ringing. She supposed that now it was someone who wished to consult her on some fresh case that had turned up.

"Yes?" she queried, putting the ear-piece to her ear.

"Is that you, Sister Marion?"

"Yes. Is it Mr. Rosson?"

"Yes. Have you seen the evening paper?"

"No; what is in it that is special?"

"Come to my room and I will tell you."

Full of curiosity away went Sister Marion at once to Mr. Rosson's room and found him standing on his

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hearth-rug with his back to the cheery fire and a newspaper open in his hand. A single glance at his face showed Sister Marion that the missioner was greatly concerned about something.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There is another corner in the cotton market——"

"Another!"

"Yes, and already things are getting desperate. All the mills in the country will be stopped and thousands of honest, industrious people thrown out of work unless things soon alter. Prices are even now going up by leaps and bounds, but the man who has cornered the cotton refuses to sell——"

"Why refuse if the prices are going up in the manner you say?"

"Because he is aiming at driving prices up to the very last figure—to a ruinous figure."

"The monster!"

"Yes, monster. There is no other epithet for him. He has the manufacturers completely in his power, and there will be great distress. . . . But Sister, whom do you imagine this monster is?"

Sister Marion shook her head.

"I have not the slightest conception," she said. "I hope, however, it is none of our people."

"Yes, it is. . . . No, it is not. One who ought to be one of us, but who has stood aloof from us though his own father is in the ranks of our ministry——"

"You cannot mean——?"

"Mr. Allan Jepson," said Mr. Rosson solemnly,

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"See!" pointing to a paragraph in the paper, "it is so stated here."

"But surely it is an error!" cried Sister Marion aghast.

"I wish I could think so."

"But it must be, it must be. How could Allan Jepson cause a corner in the cotton market? To do such a thing requires a vast amount of capital, and he cannot be in that position."

"Money, not capital, Sister. And money is easily gettable when an unscrupulous man is bent on such a crime as this, or it may even be attempted without money —oh! but what is the use of guessing how he has done it? Here is the astounding fact stated in the public newspaper, and, whether Allan Jepson has done this thing of himself, or for others who are behind him, or in conjunction with others, the ruin of the desperate hazard is being even now brought home to many. The question for us, Sister, is, what can we do in the matter?"

"What can we do!" exclaimed Sister Marion helplessly.

"We must do something. We cannot stand idly aside in this great crisis that has come upon our city. That would also be monstrous and criminal. This mission exists in Rushington to save people temporally as well as spiritually, to save their lives from destruction as well as their souls from hell. What can we do? I confess to you, Sister Marion, I do not yet know what to say, but it is plain we must do something. Let me think, let

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me think," and the missioner began to pace the floor up and down, up and down, in an excited manner.

Suddenly he stopped and lifted his hand towards Heaven, "Almighty God!" he cried, "put Thy hand heavily on the man who has brought this city to the verge of ruin and save the merchants and manufacturers and the toiling poor from the evil designs of Allan Jepson!"

Sister Marion shuddered. She had never heard the missioner thus address the Almighty before, and it seemed to her a terrible thing. The prayer seemed to her as an invocation for a curse to fall upon Allan Jepson, a prayer that put him outside the pale of Christian sympathy and feeling. What would Edith think of it? Poor Edith! it seemed doubly hard and cruel for her.

Presently Mr. Rosson faced Sister Marion, exclaiming, "I have it, I have it. I will go at once to Mr. Edwin Ingerson; he will know best what to do; he may even help us to fight this corner. Mr. Ingerson is a Christian merchant and lives but for the glory of God, and he will be prepared to do much and to sacrifice much to prevent the ruin of others. Meantime, Sister, you go to the Calverts and see Edith. If anyone has any influence with Allan Jepson she should have. Get her to plead with him to end this terrible plight into which he has thrown the commerce of this city; tell her to insist upon his doing it, and to do it immediately; let her threaten him with the loss of her love, of her respect, if he does not at once accede to her request; by every means, by every device, and every argument tell her to conjure

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him to consent;" and away went Sister Marion at once.

Curiosity led her to select the road past the Exchange steps, and, to her amazement, she found both the road and the steps blocked by a dense multitude of business men, almost all of whom wore anxious faces and were engaged in hot discussion with those standing nearest to them. Some were shouting at the top of their voices in great anger; some were gesticulating wildly; some were stamping out their passion on the pavement; and all were in a state of great excitement. It did not need any telling for Sister Marion to understand the meaning of all this feverish commotion. It was the effect of the corner created by Allan Jepson. She stood a moment or two on the edge of the crowd to look on and listen, and, as she stood, she heard Allan's name over and over again uttered in terms of execration. Many even threatened him with personal violence could they lay hands on him, and a look of murder shot from their eyes as they spoke. Sister Marion listened with shuddering and wondered what she could do to avert the wrath of the crowd, or, at any rate, to save Allan from it.

Suddenly she was almost carried off her feet by an ugly rush of the crowd in a certain direction, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she succeeded in extricating herself. When she did she hastened towards the spot where the crowd was now densest to learn the cause of the maddening rush and was just in time to see Allan Jepson making his way towards a cab that stood in wait-

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ing for him. She noticed that his face was pale-looking, but that his eyes had a flash of triumph in them. All round him men were crying, "There he is! There he is! The brute! Down with him! Down with him!" but the policemen who kept the passage guarded him from violence. But when the driver attempted to get the cab away, hundreds of men gathered round it hooting and jeering at its occupant and it was not until a cordon of police beat back the crowd that the cab managed to escape its fury.

Sick at heart Sister Marion turned away and got at once into a car going out in the direction of the Calverts'. The car was almost full of people, and they were all talking in great excitement. Sister Marion flung herself into a corner seat and listened.

"Who is this man Jepson?" someone asked.

"A comparatively unknown man in the city," answered a spectacled old gentleman, "*I* never heard of him until now."

"With Mornington & Company they say?"

"Was, but this will finish him. He will be too big for that now."

"Then, you think he will clear his pile out of this?"

"Undoubtedly. He will clear thousands."

"Unless," said another, joining in the conversation, "the corner breaks down."

"But how can it? He has played his cards too well for that. He has bought up every scrap of cotton."

"Thinks he has," said the other, "as many another wretch has thought who has attempted this kind of thing.

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But we have seen what we have seen more than once in this very city. Such men as this Jepson generally overreach themselves."

"Not generally."

"Often then. And Jepson may do the same. As I passed Mr. Ingerson's place a little while ago I saw Mr. Rosson rush in."

"The missioner?"

"Yes."

"That is good news," cried the old gentleman. "If there is a man in the city who can counteract this dastardly move Ingerson is the man to do it."

"And Mr. Rosson the man to prompt him to try. I warrant between them they will give the telegraph clerks a lively time during the next hour or so. If there is a single bale to be had for love or money in any part of the world Ingerson will buy it."

"And then Jepson can look out! He has played a desperate game, but he may find his match yet."

"The man is a beast!" suddenly exploded an old lady indignantly.

"He is all that, I grant you, but——"

"Oh! it's nothing but business, business," said the gold-spectacled gentleman. "What else is it? In this city every business man is trying to cut the other's throat and this Jepson has simply succeeded in cutting the throats of a multitude at one time. It is hard upon those who have to suffer, I admit, but there is not a man in the city who would not have done the same thing had he had the chance."

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"You don't think much of business men?"

"I don't," was the emphatic answer. "They are all of a piece when it comes to a question of outdoing their neighbour."

"Then," said the old lady more indignantly than ever, "it is high time business was conducted on more righteous principles or this city and all the business done in it will go to ruin," and she sat shaking her head vigorously.

Sister Marion looked up at hearing the old lady's voice again, and she now found herself appealed to.

"What do you say, Sister?"

"Yes, it is high time, high time," she agreed, and that was all. She was too pained at all she had heard and seen to talk about it, and she had no wish to discuss Allan Jepson's conduct with strangers.

At last the car set her down within a few yards of the Calverts' door, and, running up the steps, she rang the bell. But some minutes elapsed before the door was opened to her summons and then it was only after repeated ringing.

"Is there no one at home here?" asked Sister Marion cheerily of the maid who opened the door.

"Yes, Sister—to you. Will you step in?" and the maid spoke the words lowly and in an air of mystery.

Sister Marion passed in wondering. But the next moment she gathered something of the maid's meaning by the sounds of voices, pitched in a loud tone, coming from the drawing-room. One of the voices was plainly

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that of Allan Jepson, and, even as the maid announced her, the thought came to Sister Marion, "He is here himself! Allan is here, and I am saved from the painful duty of breaking the news to Edith. But I am glad he is here—I shall speak my mind to him."

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XXXIII

RUINED

IN the drawing-room Edith and Allan stood facing each other on the hearth-rug. They were alone when Sister Marion entered. By the sounds which had reached her ears in the hall it had seemed to the sister that several others were also present, but the actual presence of only the two in the room but served to show her the strength of the feeling in the discussion going on between them. Now they both stood in silent amazement at Sister Marion's sudden and unexpected appearance.

"No need," said the Sister, plunging at once into her business, "to introduce my mission—I hear you are already discussing it."

Allan's face grew white with rage.

"Could you hear us outside, dear Marion?" asked Edith, taking her friend's hand.

"Only as I came in," she reassured her. "But what is Allan going to do? . . . Allan Jepson," turning upon him imperiously, "what are you going to do in this dreadful matter? All the city is in an uproar over it and things are growing dangerous. What are you going to do?"

For the first time in her life the Sister saw Allan Jep-

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son as he was, rather as he had grown since she first knew him. All that innocence and charm of manner which had so won the hearts of almost everyone when he had first come to Rushington were gone—gone absolutely, and it was now the keen-witted, practical city man that looked angrily back at her from beneath beetling brows. And it was the city man of the worst type, the selfish, grasping, callous man.

"What am I going to do? Clear half a million at the least. Is that so very dreadful?"

She saw at once that he had set up his back at her interference and she determined to answer him according to his folly.

"May every coin burn your fingers to the bones if you do!" she exclaimed vehemently. "'Business!' Don't tell me that, sir, it is not business! It is sheer robbery and plunder!"

Allan stamped his foot angrily, making as he did so all the gew-gaws in the room rattle and totter.

"How dare you?" he cried with flashing eyes.

"Oh! you need not spend yourself in anger at me. I care nothing for your anger. But is it nothing to you that your selfish action is throwing all the mills in the country idle——?"

"No, nothing. The sooner the better. It will bring the manufacturers to their knees."

"Is it nothing to you that thousands of poor people are already out of employment by your action?"

"Is it so? Then that ought to hasten matters."

"Is it nothing to you," cried the Sister in an ascend-

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ing scale of voice, her passion and amazement growing with every word, "that your life is at this moment in danger, that infuriated men, men greatly wronged by your conduct, are seeking you to kill——?"

Allan shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"If they catch me," he said provokingly.

His studied coolness took her breath. For a moment she stood dazed and dumb. But the next she exclaimed passionately, "You are a beast, Allan Jepson!—that is what a person called you in the car as I came along here. You are worse than a beast, you are a monster!—that is what Mr. Rosson called you when he sent me here to warn Edith against you and to ask her to plead with you for mercy on this hapless city," and now Sister Marion turned and faced Edith.

But Edith was speechless. Horror and dismay looked out of her eyes, and her face had grown deathly white. Even then she did not know all the truth, but what she had gathered from Sister Marion's words had chilled her blood. As to sanctuary, Allan had fled to her house from the howling mob that threatened him violence, but he had told Edith nothing of that. He had only told her in his light, airy way, or in as much of it as he could assume under the circumstances, about his "good luck," about the vast pile of money he had made at a stroke, and Edith had just made the discovery, when Sister Marion arrived, that this wonderful "good luck" was the result of a great gambling deal, that this stroke was one that fell on others.

"Edith, can you say nothing to move him?"

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"No, nothing as regards this matter," Allan himself answered angrily. "You women do not understand—you cannot understand; how can you? This is absolutely a matter of business and in these things men cannot afford to listen to the sentimental nonsense of women."

"But, Allan, dear, you hear what Sister Marion says?"

"Of course I hear it. . . . And hark!—the people in the street seem to have heard it also."

They listened, and, as they did so, the noise of many voices in tumult reached them from the street. Even Sister Marion's cheek paled as she heard it.

"What does it mean?" gasped Edith, clasping her hands.

"Why, it means," cried Allan, "that Sister Marion has put the fools on my track and they are here at the door now."

Not deigning to answer him, Sister Marion crossed the room quickly, pulled the curtain a little aside, and looked out on to the street.

"Yes," she said in an awed voice a moment afterwards, "a mob is gathering in the street. . . . A score or more of angry-looking men are standing in the street looking up at the house, and they are being joined continually by others. . . . The crowd is swelling."

"What are the men like?" asked Allan, "Roughs?"

"No, working-men apparently. Men whose bread has been taken out of their mouths and who have now come here seeking the man who has taken it . . . . come here to be revenged for their wives' and children's

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sakes. I can see it in their faces—that is their determination. . . . The crowd is growing larger."

"Do you see any policemen?"

"No, not one."

"They are always alike—they are never at hand when they are wanted."

"They are not likely to be at hand now. Their sympathies are sure to be with these starving men. Mine are."

"Oh, Allan, Allan," cried Edith, "why not put an end to this? Do as Sister Marion asks you! I do not understand the meaning of it all, but I can see the danger to you, Allan. For my sake——"

"Throw away my chances of reaping a fortune from my own sagacity? You know not what you ask, Edith."

"Nor you what you say," flashed Sister Marion, turning her head round from the curtain and shooting out her words with great vehemence. "No, not your sagacity, sir, but the devil in you that has prompted you to do this great wrong."

Stung to madness by the words, he sprang forward, not knowing what he did, but Edith intercepted him. Throwing her arms round his neck she held him fast, and, looking up into his face, pleaded with him earnestly for mercy.

"Allan, what is half a million pounds, or all the money in the Bank of England, to the joy of doing right? This life here in Rushington, this money-loving city has turned your head, dear; it has changed you utterly. You are altogether unlike your old, good self. When you first

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came to Rushington, Allan, it was a joy to see your face, to hear you talk, to know that there was at least one pure and wholesome man in the midst of so much misery and sin. But you are changed, Allan, changed. The narrowing lust of gold has eaten into your heart, and, as dry rot, is destroying all your manhood. Soon you will not have a fine feeling left. . . . But, now, Allan, now is the time to break with this overmastering passion, now or never, Allan. You have been beaten all along the line so far; and, though you have not seen it, I have seen it, and others have seen it, you have been defeated and disgraced at every point. Now, you have to fight your final battle—to-night, now! If you allow yourself to be conquered now, Allan, you are conquered for ever. You will never be able to rise again if you are thrown now. Allan, dear Allan, do you hear me? do you hear me?"

Her utterance was as a torrent, and her pleadings the hot, passionate expression of a full heart, of a heart full of foreboding and fear for the man she loved. Allan trembled as he heard her and tried to free himself from her embrace, but she would not let him go and she went on again as before.

"It is a fight to the finish, Allan, a fight for your manhood, for your very soul. Come, let me help you. Who should help you, Allan, if not I? Who has the more right to help you than I? I am your betrothed, Allan, your affianced bride, and your decision now is a decision for both of us. Think of it, Allan, think of it! Oh! for the love you bear me, Allan, for the sake of all we are to

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each other, for the sake of our hope, put your heel on the neck of this passion and free yourself for ever from its demoralising and degrading influences!"

Still he did not speak. He stood biting his lips till the blood showed on them. His brows were knit and his face set and pale. Evil fires flashed in his eyes, and no sign of yielding appeared on his countenance. Outside the din of voices was increasing, and Sister Marion now made another announcement.

"The leaders have gathered together to discuss what to do. They are standing just opposite the window. . . . Edith, is Mr. Calvert not at home?"

"No, though he ought to be here soon now."

"Where is the telephone?"

"In the study."

"I will ring up——"

"Sensible at last," broke in Allan. "Ring up the police. This kind of thing ought not to be permitted in a civilised city," and once more he struggled to free himself from Edith's embrace, to follow Sister Marion to the telephone.

But Edith held him.

"No, Allan, you shall not move till you promise me. Promise me, promise me! Bid Sister Marion go and tell the men in the street that you have voluntarily taken off the ban you have put on the sale of cotton—tell her to say that everyone is now free to buy at a fair price. Don't shake your head, Allan; you must, you must. For your own sake, as much as for the men outside, you must. You must win the victory over yourself this time.

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You cannot afford to lose this battle, the consequences are too fearful to contemplate. Defeat means——"

"Damnation, body and soul," said Sister Marion, returning at that moment into the room. Neither of the two had observed her, and the words, spoken as they were in a fierce passion, startled them both, Edith loosing her hold of Allan in the fright and falling back in horror.

As for Allan, he wheeled round and faced the Sister.

"Have you rung up the police?" he demanded.

"No," defiantly.

"No!"

"I tried to ring up Mr. Rosson, but he is not at the Hall."

"Then I will ring them up," shouted Allan, and ran into the minister's study.

The two women followed him.

He turned upon them madly. "Why do you follow me?" he cried.

"I will never leave you, Allan," said Edith, "till you promise me to put an end to this great wrong. Ring up your agent, Allan, and give him the order to act. Unless you do as Sister Marion says, you will be ruined body and soul. Oh! how can you aim at growing rich at the expense of the blood and treasure of others! Such money is ill-gotten money, money got by the Devil's help alone, and it will curse instead of bless you, Allan. In the name of everything we hold sacred; by the memory of your innocent childhood, your happy home, your godly mother, ring up your agent at once and end this cruel wrong."

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"0127 on 07859!"

He had done it. He had done it without knowing what he did. His intention was to ring up the police, but, with Edith at his ear, and Sister Marion standing over him, quite against his will he had asked to be put in communication with Charlie Fairclough. And, before he scarcely realised it, he was talking to Fairclough on the telephone.

"Who is that?" he called.

"07859," came the metallic answer.

"Who?" asked Allan in amazement.

"07859—Fairclough, financial agent. Who are you?"

"You, Charlie!" and Allan stood a moment positively aghast at the discovery. Then he went on again. "I thought I was calling up the police. This house is surrounded by a howling mob. You must do something——"

"Allan, Allan," cried Edith, "give him your orders. Don't fritter away your good resolutions."

At that moment there was a loud knocking at the front door, and the three stared at each other in alarm.

"It is the signal!" whispered Sister Marion, her face grown white with fear despite herself. "The crowd is growing impatient. . . . They have sent their leaders to ask if you are here, Allan Jepson. . . . Shall I go out to them?"

"Yes, go, dear Marion. . . . No, no, do not open the door. There may be murder . . . unless, unless Allan gives the word. . . . Allan, the supreme moment has come. Everything depends upon your decision

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now. · You must act at once. Either you must send these men away assured that you have righted the wrong you have done them, or be prepared to withstand them."

But Allan's ear was at the telephone and some stronger interest than Edith's words held him.

"What?" he gasped, and his face was terrible to behold.

Again loud knocking at the door, loud and persistent knocking.

"I will go to the window again and peep out," said Sister Marion and she hastened away.

"Failed?" Allan was asking, his terror growing the while. "What has failed? . . . No, I won't believe it. . . . Impossible! . . . It cannot be. . . . What do you say? . . . But we bought up every bale! . . . What! . . . Twenty thousand bales from the States? . . . Consigned to Edwin Ingerson? . . . Then, we have failed indeed, Charlie, and are ruined . . . ruined . . . What shall we do? God knows, I don't. . . . Sell out? What is the use? . . . Yes, sell out, sell out. Get any price you can, and then. . . ."

But the remainder of the words were lost in the sudden commotion in the hall. Sister Marion had opened the door.

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XXXIV

FLIGHT

SISTER MARION had gone back to the window in dread, but the moment she looked out she saw that a change had come over the demeanour of the crowd. Its threatening aspect had gone and a look of relief sat upon the faces of the men.

A moment more and she saw the reason of this. In and out amongst the crowd, newsboys, crying out at the top of their voices, "*Express!*" "*Echo!*" were dodging, and selling their papers like hot cakes off a griddle. Everywhere in the crowd men were snatching up the papers eagerly. As each man got a paper he opened it out quickly and read aloud, for the benefit of those who pressed round him on all sides, from the latest news column. The next moment the men were shaking each other by the hand excitedly and laughing and talking in a babel of voices.

Sister Marion guessed the truth. The corner was broken and the men were congratulating each other upon the happy event. There was no need now to keep the door closed; there was nothing to fear; and she ran and opened it at once to the urgent knocker without.

"What is it?" gasped Allan Jepson at that moment,

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dropping the ear-piece of the telephone and turning with startled face to Edith.

Loud voices reached them from the hall.

Edith listened a moment.

"It is father and mother returned, only father and mother, Allan. There is nothing to fear."

Suddenly a great huzza fell upon their ears, and, for a moment, both stood staring at each other in terror. They knew it not, but it was only the crowd relieving its feelings.

"I will go and see, Allan. Stay you here," and Edith ran out into the hall.

"Oh! what is it? what is it?" she cried.

"The corner is broken!" exclaimed Sister Marion, "and the men are shouting for joy."

"Mr. Ingerson," explained the minister, "has come to the aid of this city once more and has managed to put an end to this stupendous iniquity. . . . But, where is Allan? He is here, is he not? In the study? What could he have been thinking of to attempt this gigantic wickedness?"

While he had been talking the minister had been moving towards the study; and now, on entering it, he cried out, "Here, did you say? Allan is not here."

The women had followed him and now stood speechless with astonishment.

"Did you say in here, Edith?"

"Yes; he was here a moment ago. I left him to come to you at the cheering."

"Then he has flown," said the minister solemnly.

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"Flown! Why?" gasped Mrs. Calvert.

"Fear," replied her husband.

"Of what?"

The minister shook his head. "Cannot say. Though there is some reason for it, you may depend."

"Poor boy!" sighed Mrs. Calvert.

"Aye, poor boy!" exclaimed the minister, and then, his eyes flashing with anger, went on in a torrent, "It is this cursed city. It is always the same. Allan is but one of the hundreds who have gone down under the blighting influences here. . . . If I had a boy of my own," turning to Sister Marion, "I should make him into an honest artisan, into anything whatever, rather than expose him to the temptations of commercial life in Rushington."

"But commercial life may be as pure as any other," said Sister Marion.

"May be;—ought to be," replied the minister, "but the facts are against it. . . . Oh, but I know it, I know it. In this city, I repeat, the facts are against it. We have seen it over and over again. Your slow man, the man with no ambition or ability, may keep his purity, and, in consequence, be doomed for life to sit upon a high stool slaving at ledgers or some other menial drudgery for those who grow fat, but the young fellow with ambition, who means to get on, who is going to carry all before him, is not safe in this city. Either he will end as poor Allan Jepson has ended, and scores like him, or he will become a cynic and an unbeliever.

"I know what I am talking about," he went on. "Even

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in the Christian ministry here the blighting influence of the commercial life is felt. I feel it myself. I am not the man I was when I first came to this city. I believed the whole Bible then, line by line and word by word. I would have fought to the death against anyone who denied plenary inspiration. My love was warm; I was an enthusiast in my work; my one desire was to save perishing and immortal souls. But now," and the minister shook his head, "I fear to say how I now stand."

For a moment or two there was dead silence in the room. The minister's words had awed all. Presently, however, he went on again.

"Even your great mission, Sister, is not free from the blighting influences of commercialism. . . . Nay, do not interrupt me; God forbid that I should say one word against your good work. It is marvellous, marvellous. There is nothing like it in England, but I cannot shut my eyes to the great amount of professionalism, if I may so call it, that enters into even the work of the mission. A great deal of its success is due to its routine, to its admirable organisation, but, I put it to you, Sister, if it be the spirit of love that prompts you to go to the rescue of the perishing? Is it not merely a business? Is there not a partisan spirit about it that says, 'I am on this side, and on this side I mean to fight?' And the vast crowds that gather to hear the Gospel in the Historic Hall, is it for Christ's sake they gather, or that they are drawn thither by—oh! forgive me, forgive me. I am talking at random. It is poor Allan of whom we ought to think now."

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Whether he had been talking at random or not, Sister Marion and the others felt that the minister had spoken out of a full heart and that his words were not merely the expression of an impulse. It did indeed seem to them as if some blighting influences had been at work in the minister's life, and at work upon him for a long time.

"The question is, what are we to do?"

"Yes, what are we to do?" echoed Mrs. Calvert in tears.

"We must find Allan at all costs," said the minister.

"At all costs," repeated Edith.

"Do you think him in danger?" asked Mrs. Calvert, observing her husband's face.

"It all depends. I cannot say. He may be. It is plain, however, that he is in trouble, and in no state to be left to himself."

Edith took alarm at the words. Laying her hand on her father's arm, she looked up into his face and asked, "What do you fear, father?"

He looked back at her tenderly, and then put his arm round her and kissed her.

"You have read my thought, Edith," he confessed.

"But it was only a thought—an extreme one. It is the least possible thing that could happen. Whatever else Allan is, he is not a coward. He is a man. . . . But, come, what can we do to find him?"

"Why do you think he will not go home?"

"Home to his lodgings?"

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"Yes."

"It is the last place he will go to now."

"Why?"

"For many reasons, Edith, many reasons. We cannot discuss them now. Of course we will look in at his lodgings, just to satisfy ourselves. But——"

Sister Marion interrupted, "The Wallworths of Bridston have a telephone?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," answered the minister. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I think Miss Kit Wallworth may help us."

"Very likely, very likely. Allan often goes there."

"Not so often as formerly, I think. He seems to have cut the Wallworths of late. But Miss Kit is interested in Allan's career. . . . Nay, do not misunderstand me," observing the looks of surprise on the others' faces, "it is only because she has fears of what may happen to him in his present manner of life. Only this day, before Mr. Rosson called to send me here, Miss Kit visited me to ask me to get you, Edith, to plead with Allan to free himself from this gambling mania that has seized upon him. She had heard things; what, I do not know; but she felt that there was only Edith that could save him. There was no *professionalism*," turning now to the minister, "about her interest in Allan; it was a pure matter of Christian charity, springing from pity that so noble a young fellow as Allan Jepson should go so far wrong."

"Did she know of this unhappy business, do you think?" asked the minister.

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"No, I think not. She did not hint at any such knowledge. She spoke generally."

"Well, ring her up, ring her up. She may be helpful."

It took some little time for Sister Marion to "get through" on the wires to Bridston, and then only to learn that Miss Kit was not at home.

"Will you ask her when she comes in to ring us up? . . . Number?—0127."

"And now to pour own part, Sister," said Mr. Calvert. "You are in the very centre of information at the Historic Hall, and may learn much more quickly than we of Allan's whereabouts."

"You shall know instantly if we do."

"That is what I want to arrange. Some one of us will always be in the house, and you can ring us up. And get Mr. Rosson interested——"

"No need. He was full of rage at Allan's action. But that is past now, and he will do all he can."

"As for myself, I shall not rest till we have discovered Allan. He is almost my own boy, you know, and I love him as a father. Besides, there is Edith," and he glanced at his daughter affectionately. "Edith, child, this has made no difference?" he asked tenderly.

She shook her head.

"None whatever," she said.

"It would not have been my Edith if it had. Edith's love has been given for ever, for better, for worse; and the only difference this trouble can make is that Edith, for Allan's sake, for his salvation, will now cast to the

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winds all maidenly reserve and give her heart and soul to the rescue of Allan from destruction."

Tears sprang to Edith's eyes, but no blush of shame dyed her cheeks. Putting her hand into her father's she said with quiet emphasis, "I am ready, father, heart and soul."

"A cup of tea first then, and we will get to work. You, Edith, shall stay here for the present in attendance on the telephone while I go out into the city. I have a scheme in my head. And you, mother, might write a line or two to my old friend Cephas."

"Would you? Do you think it advisable?"

"I do. This thing will be in all the papers in the country to-morrow, and it is best that poor Cephas should know it from us. Put it gently to him, and say that we are all at work for his boy."

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XXXV

VARIOUS OPINIONS OF ALLAN JEPSON'S CONDUCT

THE city rang with Allan Jepson's amazing folly, and, next morning, the newspapers were full of it. Everywhere men discussed it with absorbing interest—over their breakfast-tables with their families, in the morning trains as they went to business in the city, in the street cars, and on 'Change.

On 'Change it was the supreme subject of discussion that morning. Men buttonholed each other the moment they set foot upon the flags and little groups stood about in all quarters discussing it, while, during the day, hard driven business men turned aside a moment or two from their more engrossing pursuits to go over it all again.

And in the city offices that morning it was just the same. Little else was spoken of between the clerks during moments of leisure, while at the establishment of Messrs. Mornington, Grayson & Company it was the sole topic all day long.

Even the great managing-director himself succumbed to the prevailing feeling and unbent himself a while to discuss the subject with Mr. Hughes.

"Who is behind Jepson?" he wondered. "That is the question."

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"Yes, who is behind him?" echoed Mr. Hughes.

"That is what I should like to know," said the astute Mr. Watson with emphasis. "For, of course, Jepson could not have attempted this thing of himself. . . . You say his books are all right?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly straight."

"I never suspected for a moment they would be wrong. Allan Jepson is as honest as the light——"

"And as true as steel."

"As true as steel," agreed Mr. Watson. "His only fault is this overweening ambition which has now dragged him down to ruin. But, after all, Hughes, he went within a shave of making a huge success of it; and, if it had not been for Ingerson, he would have come off triumphantly."

"That is so, that is so," agreed Mr. Hughes.

"And for my part," went on the great man, "I think no less of Jepson for his attempt. It is men like Jepson who have made this city what it is, the foremost in the world for push and pluck."

"Commercially."

"Yes, of course, commercially. I speak now only of commerce, but the same traits would make men succeed in any walk of life. The same traits have made England what it is."

Mr. Hughes nodded his head in agreement.

"We shall miss him here," he said.

"It will be our own fault if we do."

Mr. Hughes looked up into the face of his chief enquiringly.

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"You would bring him back again?" he asked.

"Decidedly. We cannot afford to lose such men as Jepson—the firm cannot afford it. Let this thing blow over a while and then, by all means, by hook or by crook, let us have Allan Jepson back. We will make him the head of a department. It will be well worth our while, and he will find it worth his while to return."

"But his speculations——"

"Oh! they are over. He will have done with such things now. He has had his fling as most men have in their day, and he will now be glad enough to settle down to legitimate work. Oh, yes, Hughes, we will have him back, and be glad to get him at any price."

Hugh Bottomley's views were different. In his opinion Allan Jepson had proved himself what he had always thought him, a canting rogue. There was no use denying the fact; the man who speculated with other people's money as Allan Jepson must have done in this great transaction was a scoundrel, and past forgiveness. It was bad enough to gamble with one's own money, but a man was no more than a fool for so doing; but to attempt so gigantic affair as Jepson's, man of straw that he was, was astounding, was a monstrous iniquity! Well, that was an end of Allan Jepson so far as Messrs. Mornington, Grayson & Company were concerned. He would never again be permitted to show his face in that place, and, for his part, Hugh Bottomley was not sorry. He had always disliked Jepson—hated him in fact. There was always an assumed air of superior goodness about the fellow that he couldn't stand, an affected goodness that

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brought him more credit than he really deserved. But the mask was torn off now,; the hypocrite was exposed. Mr. Watson, and all the world, would now know him for what he was, a contemptible scoundrel with an inordinate ambition to shoot above his station and abilities.

One man alone in the great establishment was silent on the tremendous sensation just then thrilling the city and agitating the minds of all his fellow-employees. That one man was Allan Jepson's old friend, Freddie Walters. Freddie was still in his old position in the firm. He had never got away from his ledger-keeping. Many new men had come to the office since he came, and nearly all in their turn had been promoted over Freddie's head, but he himself was still doomed to his life of drudgery. From early morning to late at night he toiled at his desk. No one ever seemed to take the least interest in him and few ever spoke a kind word to him. Certainly, the heads of the house never turned aside to say an encouraging word to him as he slaved on alone and apart on a miserable pittance a week, on a wage that any man who could handle a broom might easily have capped as a crossing sweeper.

But, though Freddie said nothing, he thought much. His heart had gone out to Allan Jepson at first seeing him. Somehow there had from the first been a natural affinity between the two. Perhaps it was because they were both from the country and new to city life; perhaps because their view of things was so similar. But, whatever it was, Allan Jepson had always won Freddie's respect and had treated him as a fellow-man and a brother.

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And now Freddie was grieved to the heart for Allan. It was dead against Freddie's principles to agree in any way with speculation and gambling, but he would have been overjoyed that morning had Allan's speculations succeeded instead of having failed. For, if there were one man in Rushington towards whom he felt especial goodwill, that one man was Allan Jepson; and that this great misfortune had overtaken him grieved Freddie to the quick.

He could not help feeling also, however, that his own drudgery was not without its compensations. Chained to his stool he never had any ambition beyond the faithful performance of his daily work, and there was a satisfaction in going home after the day was done feeling that it *was* done so far as his work was concerned, with no ambitious schemes to trouble him and to follow him into the quiet of his evening's rest. And, for once in his life, Freddie Walters blessed his lot and was thankful.

Very different were the feelings of Charlie Fairclough. Against his better judgment he had undertaken Allan's work. He had undertaken it under strong protest. But, when he had at last consented to act for Allan, Fairclough had been the one to enlist the sympathy and help of others in the stupendous scheme, others who had bargained for huge profits if the scheme succeeded and for dead silence as to their part in it if it failed. It was Allan's scheme entirely, the evolution of his own ambitious brain, but, as Mr. Watson opined, Allan was in reality but the tool of others who were now leaving him to bear the disgrace of the failure alone.

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Fairclough paced his office in a perfect frenzy. He had "got on in the world" since we last saw him in his office and it was not now the bare, cheerless room it was when we first looked into it. He was really and truly a financial agent now and with an office that accorded well with his calling, elegantly furnished and fitted with every modern requirement.

But these things were to him now as dead sea fruit. What were they all to him now that Allan Jepson's venture had failed? That and that alone now filled all his thoughts and affected all his feelings. As for himself it did not matter. He could still go on as he had done. His business was to dupe, and cheat, and swindle his fellows, and that business he was a past-master in and could carry on successfully without the least qualms of conscience or compunction. But he could not cheat Allan Jepson. His whole soul revolted against that; against cheating the one man in Rushington for whom he really cared. He had known Allan in better days and Allan Jepson had always treated him with consideration and respect. He could not forget that, and he could not, for all it might bring him, be guilty of a dishonest act towards his old friend.

It grieved him sorely that he should ever have consented at all to be Allan's agent. His advice to Allan had been to shrink from the thought of speculation as from a pestilence. He wished now he had refused absolutely—that he had gone further and threatened Allan with exposure did he persist in his mad determination. In that way he might have saved him from the ruin that

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had overtaken him. He wished he had been firmer, and was angry with himself for his weakness. And he was angry with those who had made Allan his tools. He resolved if he could in any way bring them to book he would do so.

He turned again to pace the length of his office, when, at that moment, the door was thrown suddenly open and a man, haggard-looking, unkempt, pale, and with a startled and frightened look on his face rushed into the room.

It was Allan Jepson.

"For Heaven's sake, Charlie, help me! save me!" he cried.

Fairclough took in the situation at a glance. Springing forward he shut and locked the door and set his back against it.

"Police?" he gasped, his face now showing that he was no less frightened than Allan.

Allan nodded in great agitation.

"There is a warrant out for my arrest," he said.

"And is it known that you have come here? Are they even now pursuing you?"

"They may be—yes, they must be. I am known to almost everyone in the city and cannot have escaped notice."

"What are the charges against you?"

"This——"

"The failure of the corner?"

"Yes."

"There can be no charges brought against you on that

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score. You speculated—you lost. What further can be said about it?"

"I don't know—I can't tell. But a charge can always be made against a person when an enemy determines to do so."

"Granted. But what then?"

Allan stared at Fairclough in amazement.

"Any charge you know, Allan, has to be proved. Have you distinctly heard of a warrant being out, or are you frightening yourself without cause?"

Allan had heard of it. He was sure of it. He had overheard men on the street talking about it.

"He will be caught yet," he had heard one man say.

"Not been to his diggings yet?" he had heard another man ask.

"A gigantic swindler," a third man had exclaimed.

"But the law will reach him yet," a fourth had answered.

"Yes, the long arm of the law," they all had agreed.

Fairclough was by no means satisfied with this explanation. It proved nothing more than that the spirit of vengeance was abroad in the city against Allan, and that could be understood easily. But it did not prove that a warrant had been issued for Allan Jepson's arrest, and Fairclough could conceive no grounds on which one could be issued.

Yet for Allan's peace of mind he saw that something must be done.

But what?

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He put the question to Allan himself and Allan said that he must go into hiding. There was nothing else for it, he averred in terror. He must get out of the way. He must burrow in some place where men could not find him.

And his affairs?

He would leave them with Fairclough to settle.

And as for his agent?

Oh, his agent was not involved in this tangle. He was only the agent, and nothing could happen to him because of it. If any harm threatened Fairclough then, Allan declared, he would come out of his hiding voluntarily and brave any punishment or suffer any disgrace to save his friend.

"Very well," said Fairclough, "where shall the hiding-place be? . . . . Hist! . . . . A knock! . . . . Yonder, Allan!" and Fairclough pointed to a screen behind which Allan quickly and noiselessly secreted himself.

Then, Fairclough in a business-like manner unlocked the door, and in bustled no less a person than the Reverend David Calvert.

Peeping round the screen, while his heart beat violently, Allan watched Mr. Calvert's face.

Mr. Calvert wanted to know if Fairclough knew anything of Allan's whereabouts, and Fairclough said he could not inform him.

Did he know?

No, he did not know.

Mr. Calvert stood a moment or two in perplexity, and Allan, watching him, was strongly tempted to reveal

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himself. The sight of Mr. Calvert's distress touched Allan keenly.

When did Fairclough see Allan last?

Yesterday.

At what time? Before or after the announcement that the corner had broken down?

After.

Had he heard nothing of Allan since?

Nothing.

Greatly disappointed Mr. Calvert turned away at last, shaking his head gravely as he went, and Allan came out from his hiding-place. He was now trembling from head to foot and looked a pitiable object. That glimpse of his old friend's face had chilled Allan's heart and had revealed to him as in a flash the distress of the minister and all of the Calverts on his behalf. But what could he do? He could not voluntarily give himself up. He could not risk being arrested.

"Why, man," said Fairclough, "why are you trembling so? It was only your old friend."

Allan nodded, and steadied himself by holding on to the desk. "That makes it all the worse," he said. "I might have been braver if it had been an enemy—if it had been a policeman, but——," and he could say no more, the strength of his feeling overpowering him.

"Well, by hook or by crook, Allan, we must get you away. This kind of thing will be the death of you. . . . Now, where can we stow you? It is plain that this place is not safe. People will naturally come here to seek for

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you. . . . I have it, Allan, I have it. You remember Davy Daggers?"

Allan nodded.

"We will go to his diggings. That's the place. I saw Davy yesterday. Come, put up the collar of your coat, and draw this cap well over your eyes, and we will set off at once. You will be safe with Davy until this thing blows over."

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XXXVI

NO NEWS

THREE whole days passed and Allan could not be found. The Calverts, the Wallworths, and Sister Marion had all made diligent search, but without avail. The Reverend Cephas Jepson came up to Rushington and joined in the search. But not the slightest clue had been obtained and the whole affair was now wrapped in mystery.

The newspapers began to comment upon it, and the suggestion was thrown out that Allan Jepson had done away with himself, driven to desperation by the failure of his scheme; so the river was dragged, but, of course, without result.

"Yet, for all that," thought Mr. Calvert, "I fear some terrible harm has come to the poor lad."

"Do I understand you, old friend," asked Allan's distracted father for the hundredth time, "to say that there has been no fraud about this unhappy business?"

"None."

"None whatever?"

"None of any kind."

"Then why does my boy hide himself?"

Mr. Calvert shook his head. He could not tell. And the same question was being asked by scores of

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others in the city. Why had Allan Jepson gone? He had attempted an amazing speculation it was true, but it had failed, miserably failed, and no one was the loser but himself. He was probably ruined, and deserved to be, but there was no legal reason why he should not go about the city as before. And as for the story of his having destroyed himself, that could hardly be believed unless—unless his failure had turned his brain.

Kit Wallworth believed neither of these suggestions. She knew Allan Jepson as few could know him and she refused to credit either his loss of reason or self-destruction. She thought she saw through his motive. Fear and shame had driven him into hiding, and, whatever others said or thought, she quietly pursued her search. Every morning she made it her business to call upon Sister Marion to ask if she had any news of Allan, and, when she had satisfied herself that none was forthcoming, she hastened away to make enquiries elsewhere, visiting, during the day, all kinds of likely and unlikely places.

"The Calverts," said Sister Marion one morning to Kit, "are most grateful to you for the interest you are taking in this matter."

"Why should I not be interested?" she asked impulsively, and then coloured deeply.

"Yes, why shouldn't you?" asked Sister Marion.

"I have reason to be grateful to Allan Jepson for many kindnesses."

"Edith would be glad if you called on her."

But Kit shook her head.

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"Afterwards—perhaps; but not now. Every minute is precious at present, and there is something more to do than waste time in paying courtesies," and Kit went on her way. Sister Marion watched her go quickly through the long corridors of the Hall and down the great flight of steps. Then Sister Marion turned back into her room, wondering as she did so whether Kit Wallworth or Edith Calvert loved Allan Jepson the more.

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XXXVII

KIT MAKES A DISCOVERY

KIT had gone about her search astutely. She heard that Charlie Fairclough protested his ignorance of Allan's place of abode, but she did not believe him. So she got Jake to call on Fairclough and try to worm the secret out of him, but Fairclough protested ignorance.

Still Kit did not believe him, and, on the fourth morning of Allan's flight, she boldly marched into Fairclough's office herself and demanded from him the information she sought.

Fairclough shook his head.

"Oh," cried Kit, "it is all rubbish about your not knowing. If anyone knows *you* do," she declared emphatically.

"My dear lady," Fairclough began, when she interrupted him abruptly.

"Don't 'my dear' me. Just tell me what I want to know."

Fairclough shrugged his shoulders and spread out his palms.

"There is nothing further to say to a lady who won't take an answer," he said.

Then Kit tried a gentler mood.

"You need not fear my knowing," she said persua-

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sively. "I am Allan Jepson's friend, and I am anxious only to be of service to him."

She could get nothing out of Fairclough. He was as secret as the grave.

"Permit me, then," said Kit, "to write a note for Mr. Jepson."

To that Fairclough offered no objection and provided Kit with pen, ink, and paper. When she had written it she sealed the note in the envelope and handed it to Fairclough, saying, "You will at least do me the favour to give this note to Mr. Jepson, and I will call again to-morrow for an answer."

Fairclough smiled. "You may leave the note here," he said, "and if Mr. Jepson looks in, I shall give it to him."

That evening Fairclough took the note to Allan and together they opened the envelope over the steam of the kettle. It contained only a few words asking Allan to bid Fairclough bring the writer to him. But, when Allan saw that the note was signed "Kit," he exclaimed, "No, her least of anyone. Not Kit, not Kit Wallworth."

Next day Kit returned to Fairclough's office and found her letter lying on the desk apparently unopened.

Still she did not believe in Fairclough's ignorance. She could not but admire Fairclough for his devotion to Allan, but she was none the less determined to find out Allan's hiding-place.

"And I will find it out," she said as a parting shot on leaving Fairclough's office.

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"I hope you will, my lady," said Fairclough imperturbably.

"And shall have nothing to thank you for," said Kit.

With this end in view Kit ascertained the time Fairclough usually left his office in the evening and then set herself to watch him. Standing apart, she saw him at last come out of Financial Buildings and walk leisurely down Lombard Street in the direction of the post-office. She followed him at a distance and kept him in view through many turnings and windings until at last she found herself in the neighbourhood of the theatres. There she saw Fairclough stop and speak to a shabbily-dressed young fellow who carried himself with a jaunty air and who looked for all the world like an actor down on his luck as he was at the heels. A few moments afterwards she saw Fairclough get into a hansom and drive off.

Kit was bitterly disappointed. She had hoped to track Fairclough to Allan's hiding-place, for she felt sure that he visited Allan night after night to report to him the state of affairs. But she was not defeated. Next night she tried again, and with the same result. It was curious. Each night Fairclough had called at the theatre, spoken to the same young fellow, and had then driven off in a hansom. She altered her tactics. Instead of watching for Fairclough to leave his office she waited for him at the theatre on the next night, and found, as she expected, the same thing repeated as on the previous two nights.

Then she did a bold thing. The moment Fairclough had driven off she approached the young fellow, placed

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her hand upon his shoulder, and asked him if he were Davy Daggers.

"Excuse the liberty," she said, smiling. "My friend Allan Jepson always calls you Davy and so I naturally fell into it. Mr. Daggers, I ought to have said."

For just one moment Daggers was filled with astonishment, but it vanished instantly he looked into the lovely face of the charming girl who had addressed him.

"You do me a great honour," he said, taking off his hat and bowing low.

"In using your Christian name?"

"Yes, by Jove!"

"Will you do me one?"

"Give me the chance!"

"Allow me then to pay for a seat in the dress circle for Allan's old friend," and she put a sovereign into Davy's hand. He gazed at the coin a moment or two in amazement, spat over his little finger for good luck, and then declared it was an honour he would with pleasure allow her to perform.

"You will see Allan when you go home?" put in the crafty Kit.

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Would you mind then giving him my card and saying that I hope to call on him as soon as I can get the chance? Say to him that the hearts of his old friends are beating true for him and that they are all longing to see him again."

Daggers said that he would be glad to do so. But Miss Wallworth, he went on, glancing at Kit's card,

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must not call upon Allan, she really must not. Oh, no, he was not afraid of her betraying Allan. He recognised her as Allan's friend and he had often heard Allan mention her name. But—well, his "diggings," were not the place for a lady to visit. It would have been all right had he been living at home, but he and the "governor" had separated long ago, and he was now living in a very humble way. Wouldn't it do for her to write to Allan? No, perhaps, that would not do. It might be too risky. Any letter passing through the post-office with Allan's name on would be sure to occasion remark and excite suspicion. He had it now. Why not write to Allan under cover of his, Davy's, name? Write the address on the envelope in red ink and he would understand by that that the letter was really for Allan;—Mr. David Daggers, 3 Clive Street, would find him.

Kit could hardly suppress her excitement.

"At any rate," she said, "you will give him my message?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"What is the play to-night?" she asked, changing the subject with guile.

"The *Gamester*."

"I hope you will enjoy it."

"You bet," he said with emphasis, and Kit held out her hand.

"It is quite a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Daggers—Davy Daggers, I mean. You will pardon the liberty? Thank you, thank you. You are Allan's friend, you know. Well, a good time to you. Good-night, good-night."

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XXXVIII

FACE TO FACE

WHERE was Clive Street?

That was the question Kit Wallworth had to settle. She ran along a little way so as to be out of observation of anyone who might have seen her talking to Daggers, and then asked a policeman.

Clive Street, he told her, lay in the east-end of the city, a mile and a half away from where she stood. But what did a lady such as she appeared to be want in Clive Street? Did she not know that it was in the lowest part of the city, and the quarter where all the thieves and vagabonds harboured? She did not know it? Then she knew it now; and, unless her business there was of an urgent character, he would advise her not to go near the place.

The business was important? And urgent? Then she ought not to venture into Clive Street alone; not without a man with her who would be able to protect her and defend her also if necessary. Moreover, with a companion or without, she ought not to think of passing down Clive Street dressed as she was then. She ought to disguise herself; she ought to put on some old clothes which would keep her from being quizzed by the curious. Otherwise she would be a mark for all the rascals in the place.

But nothing deterred Kit. Her heart was bent on saving Allan and leading him back again to his past life of inno-

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cence and happiness; so, thanking the policeman, she hastened away to a shop where she knew she could purchase some second-hand over-garments, which would completely hide her finery.

At the shop she also purchased a head shawl which she fastened under her chin; and, after packing her hat in a card-board box and posting it to her home in Bridston, she was ready to set out for Clive Street.

For this purpose she took a cabby into her confidence.

"You can drive me to Clive Street?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; jump in."

"Stay," she whispered, "I don't want to be driven right into the street, but only to within an easy walking distance from it. You understand?"

Cabby got down from his box and came and stood beside her.

"You understand me?" Kit repeated. "To within easy walking distance from Clive Street only, a point from which I will not be too narrowly observed and from which I can enter the street without exciting suspicion of any who may chance to see me alight."

"A little mystery about this?" queried the cabby confidentially.

"It is a little private business on which I am bent——"

"Will you be returning, miss?"

"Oh, yes; I want you to wait for me to drive me to the Central afterwards."

"Right you are, miss. Get in. Understand you perfectly."

"Thanks."

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"Get in. You can rely upon me doing this little job neat, and on the strict Q. T."

Twenty minutes afterwards Kit found herself alighting at a dark and gloomy corner.

"First turning on your left," said the cabby bending down and speaking in a low tone. "First turning on your left," and he pointed with his whip. "Quick! or, even here you may be watched! I will drive round and round and be back at this point every quarter of an hour. You will be able to find it again?"

"Yes," Kit replied cautiously.

"Then away you go," said cabby, and whipped up his nag.

Kit had always prided herself on her knowledge of the topography of her native city of Rushington; but she was now treading a quarter absolutely unknown to her, and one so squalid and poverty-stricken she never dreamt existed in her native city. Clive Street itself was particularly squalid-looking. She had entered it from the end where the numbers were highest and she had consequently to walk the whole length of the street before she reached number three, the house for which she was looking. Crowds of ragged, dirty children played in the street and made the night hideous with yells. Most of them, she observed at a glance as she went along, were famished-looking and pale. The doors of the houses stood open, and unkempt, untidy men and women sat on the door-steps or lolled against the railings. At one part of the street several women in striped petticoats and bare heads were dancing to the accompaniment of a wretch-

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edly played concertina. The player was a young fellow in moleskins with white bone buttons, apparently one of the "swells" of the street. He swung round as Kit passed and called upon her to join them. But she passed on hurriedly and without reply.

At length she reached number three, and now a difficulty presented itself. For whom should she enquire? But there was no time then for consideration or delay. Already some curious eyes were observing her, and, even a moment's hesitation might be dangerous. So, putting a bold face on it, she at once tripped up the steps and passed through the open doorway.

In the lobby an awful-looking woman, with red hair, bloated face, and arms akimbo, barred her further progress.

"Well, and what is it?" she demanded with a foul expression.

Kit halted suddenly and the blood left her face.

"Got in the wrong house maybe?" queried the woman, not so unkindly as her looks and her foul speech suggested. "Whose house do you lodge in?"

"Does Mr. Daggers live here?" gasped Kit.

"Davy Daggers does. Oh! if you are one of his pals, come in. But Davy is out. Don't know when he'll be home. Somewhere towards morning, perhaps. You can wait if you like. There's a pal of Davy's inside," and the woman nodded towards a room at the end of the passage, "if you care to go in and ask him," and with that the virago passed on out to the doorstep.

Kit breathed afresh. She had conquered the last diffi-

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culty and now nothing but a closed door stood between her and Allan. For Allan was plainly the pal of whom the woman spoke.

With beating heart Kit went forward to the door and knocked lightly. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned the handle of the door and walked into the room. As she did so a young man, who had been sitting before a low fire with his face buried in his hands, rose to his feet and stared at her in terror. His eyes were sunken, his face was pale, and his hair was tinging grey.

It was Allan, and yet it was not Allan; not the Allan Kit had known and loved. She closed the door behind her and bolted it mechanically, and then stood a moment or two in dread, her bosom swelling and her heart throbbing painfully.

"Who are you?" gasped Allan presently. "And what do you want?"

For answer she tore off the shawl from her head and flung the rough overall from her.

"Kit!" he cried in amazement, and held up his hands as if to hide from him the tender look in her eyes.

"Allan!" she cried in answer, and ran and threw herself on his neck while she poured out her soul in tears.

Several minutes passed before either of them could speak again and then it was Kit who spoke first.

"Forgive me, Allan," she said penitently. "I forgot myself in the joy of seeing you again. . . . Allan, do you know that poor Edith is breaking her heart for you? . . . Oh, no, she has not given you up. How can you think that? A woman does not give up a man so easily and no

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woman can give up a man to whom she has plighted her troth. Your downfall, Allan? What has that to do with it? When a true woman grants her love to a man she does so 'for better or worse' and she loves him right on through either. . . . You don't think that of Edith? That is because you have never known Edith properly and have never loved her as you ought. But Edith loves you, Allan; and she loves you more than ever now that this trouble has overtaken you. She is looking for you everywhere night and day. With Sister Marion she is scouring the city in search of you and returning home every night with heavy feet and a breaking heart. And that is not all, Allan. Your father is in Rushington——"

"My father!" Allan cried with blanched cheek.

"Yes, your father. He and Mr. Calvert have been almost everywhere seeking you. . . . I am beginning to fear for the consequences to your poor old father unless you return home again . . . . and return soon."

"I dare not, I dare not."

"Why not?"

"Oh! don't ask me?"

"What have you to fear?"

"Kit, do you need to ask?"

"Yes, I do. And everyone is asking the same question. No one seems to know why you have hidden yourself. You have not committed a felony that you should fly the police. You have been a fool, Allan, a fool to yourself, that is all. You have disregarded all warnings and have allowed the narrowing lust of gold to ruin you as in the end it ruins everyone, if not in one way then in

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another. But your case is not the worst, nor yet is it hopeless. Hugh Bottomley's is infinitely worse than yours——"

"Why, what has he done?" gasped Allan, aghast.

"So narrowed his heart that there is not an atom of room left in it now for a single spark of human feeling. Hugh Bottomley is completely eaten up by the gold fever. But you, Allan, have been saved from that final calamity by this failure of your schemes. And I am glad they have failed, right down glad of it and thankful; yes, and you also will one day be glad because of it. Your failure has kept intact your humanity. It has not been shriveled up like Hugh Bottomley's. Had you succeeded, Allan, you would simply have been a monster, a veritable monster! . . . . But come, Allan, why do you hide here? Is it the disgrace of your failure? Well, you will get over that——"

"I shall never get over it, never so long as I live."

"Oh, yes, you will. Time is a great healer. . . . Yet, in one sense, Allan, I hope you never will. But, why add to your misery and remorse by living here? Why, Allan, this house is nothing but a thieves' den——"

"Hush!" and Allan held up a warning hand.

"What do I care? It is so, and no place for you to live in. The whole neighbourhood reeks with vice and villainy."

"For Heaven's sake, Kit, hush! These walls are only of lath and plaster and everything can be heard through them. And you are not safe here. Let me help you on with your cloak again, and tie that ugly shawl under

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your chin lest anyone should come in and discover you here. I couldn't save you, Kit, if they discovered that you were a lady. You would be robbed, stripped and turned out on to the street with scant covering."

She was frightened at this and allowed him to help her on with her cloak. But she never ceased pleading with him all the time.

"What am I to say to them when I go home?"

"Nothing. Kit you would never betray me?" and Allan's face took on a look of alarm.

"I will never consent to allow you to remain here."

"But I am only safe here, Kit."

"Nonsense! You have frightened yourself into this exile. That is what everyone is saying. If you were to appear publicly in the city to-morrow who could lay a hand on you? The wrong you attempted did not succeed. It is over and past. It is now more than a week since you disappeared and already your folly would have been forgotten as a nine days' wonder if you had not intensified the interest in it by this cowardly hiding. Come, I mean to be plain with you, sir. For the sake of others, I speak; for the sake of Edith. Allan, you must return home. I will not leave this thieves' den till you give me your promise."

She stood before him with flashing eyes. He shrunk from her. He felt as one at bay. He was cornered. There was no escape for him. This girl before him meant all she said, and he knew he would have to give his promise.

But what did the promise mean? It meant again meet-

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ing all those from whose gaze he shrank, again meeting Edith, and Mr. Calvert, and his father. That was an ordeal as yet too terrible for him to contemplate. His guilty soul could not venture into the presence of those pure lives.

And as for Edith! Oh! the meeting with her above all others, would be too painful, too humilitating. She was ever pure in thought and heart and life; she was so much above even the best of all other women; so proper, particular, and exact in all her ways. He felt he could die with shame if he looked into her eyes again.

"You will give me your promise, Allan?" Kit urged, for she saw that he was wavering. "Yes, I know it will be painful. But that is the penalty of your wrong-doing, and you will never be able to escape that. But, oh, Allan, do not make it still more painful by delaying the meeting with your friends. They *are* friends, you know; *friends*. You will promise, won't you? . . . . I won't ask that you leave here to-night, much as it horrifies me to think of you here. But to-morrow, Allan, to-morrow? If I make the return easy for you? If I come again to-morrow and assure you, on the word of those who know, that there is no danger whatever in returning? On these conditions, Allan, will you promise?

"Come, you need not fear. I shall be discreet. I shall not trumpet the matter from the housetops. No one but your own good friends will hear of it . . . . and, Allan, I promise you solemnly, if there be the least danger, I will release you from your word. Now, is not that fair? Could I be more reasonable than this? But here,

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Allan, I will not consent to leave you to rot in this den of thieves."

She pleaded with her hand upon his shoulder and with upturned face. There were tears in her eyes now, and the sight of them went to Allan's heart as a stab. He sank into his chair again and covered his face with his hands.

"I promise, I promise," he said.

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XXXIX

EDITH TO THE RESCUE

SISTER Marion was unusually late leaving the Hall that night. Never before, during any one day, had she had so much to do, so many cases to attend to, so many trying circumstances to perplex her. But the day was done at last and she was now putting on her bonnet to go home. Standing before her little mirror she was now tying the white strings under her chin, and thinking as she did so, "No news yet of Allan Jepson," when she became aware of a knocking at her door. Sick at heart, for she was very tired, she turned from the mirror, and cried, "Come in!" and, thereupon, there walked into the room a woman habited in a long coarse, well-worn cloak and with a shawl on her head. As she entered, the woman closed the door after her and then, ex-exhausted, sank into a chair.

Sister Marion's tiredness all vanished now. The sight of weakness and suffering ever drew from her all her sympathy and strength, and she now sprang forward and dropped on her knees beside the exhausted woman.

"What can I do for you, my dear?" she asked tenderly. "You are quite done up. . . . Is it hunger, or

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trouble, or—what? . . . . Come, confide in me; I am your friend and live only to help such as you, poor dear. . . . What is it, child, what is it?"

The woman rose, unfastened her shawl, threw off her sombre cloak, and Kit Wallworth stood revealed before Sister Marion.

Sister Marion gave a start at the sight of her and uttered a low cry of surprise.

"Miss Wallworth!"

Kit nodded. "I felt faint . . . . but I am better now. Let me sit down a moment . . . . to steady myself a bit. . . . There, that is better. I shall be *quite* myself in a little time."

Several minutes elapsed before either spoke again, Kit meantime endeavouring with set face to conquer the feeling she had to faint and Sister Marion quietly bathing her brow and temple with eau-de-cologne.

At length Kit heaved a great sigh and declared that she was well again.

Sister Marion kissed her and smiled happily at her through her tears.

"But not well enough yet, dear, to talk much. You must keep quite quiet for a time. You have gone through a good deal, I can see, but you need not tell me of it to-night. To-morrow will do. You must just rest quietly here awhile and afterwards we shall get you home."

Kit lifted her pale face and looked gratefully into Sister Marion's. Just then Kit's face was like an angel's, and Sister Marion ever afterwards declared that she never

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saw any face so much like what she imagined those in Heaven were like as Kit's was then.

"Sister Marion," she said, and she said it as if she were removing the weight of the world, "I have found him!"

"Found him!"

"Yes."

"Allan Jepson?"

"Yes."

"Where? How? . . . . But I must not ask you now. You are not fit to talk. To-morrow will do. That you have found him is enough for the present. It will set many hearts kindling for joy. But," for an awful thought now flashed through Sister Marion's brain, "one question, dear, just one: Is he alive?"

"Oh, yes."

"That will do, that will do. Not another word. The rumors as to his having destroyed himself are not true, and that is enough for the present. Now, come, let me make you a cup of tea. It will revive you. . . . And, while the water is boiling, shall I just telephone the glad news to the Calverts? Edith will be overjoyed to hear it. Poor girl! she has not had one night's sleep since Allan went away, and has gone to a perfect shadow of her old self. And Allan's father, as you know, is at the Calverts'. He is just breaking his old heart on account of his boy, but this glad news will warm his old blood again. Mr. Calvert and Mrs. Calvert, they will be greatly relieved to hear it. There," as she put a light to the little stove, "the water will soon be boiling now. What shall I say? Shall it be 'Allan found by Miss Wallworth, and

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is quite well?' . . . . Quite well; it will be all right to say that, will it?"

She had already taken up the mouthpiece of the telephone and was about to ring up the central when Kit held up her hand.

"Wait!" she said.

Sister Marion paused and glanced at Kit.

"Wait!" repeated Kit, "I am well enough now to talk —to tell you all. Sit down and listen. You can telephone afterwards."

"Are you quite sure you feel well enough?"

"Oh, yes, sit down," and Kit at once plunged into her story and told Sister Marion all that it was necessary for her to know. She did not, however, tell her where Allan was to be found nor how she came to discover him, and Sister Marion had to be content. She, however, had no difficulty in forming an opinion upon the subject. Kit's disguise proved conclusively that Allan Jepson lay hidden in some dangerous quarter of the city and that Kit had ventured her life for his salvation. That was enough for Sister Marion at present. She did not ask to know more. All the rest, she knew, would be revealed when Kit perfected her plans.

"And now," said Kit, when she had finished her story, "you can telephone to the Calverts."

"May I?" cried Sister Marion springing to her feet.

"Just the bare facts," said Kit, "explanations can wait."

In a moment Sister Marion had rung up the Central and had got through shortly afterwards to 0127.

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"Who is it?" came the query.

"Sister Marion. . . . Is that you, Edith?"

"Yes. Have you news?"

"Yes, good news. Miss Wallworth is here. She has found Allan!"

Very clearly a cry of delight came from the other end of the wire, and then was heard a sob, a half-stifled sob. A moment afterwards it was Mr. Calvert's voice that was heard speaking.

"Allan found?" he was asking.

"Yes."

"Glory! . . . . Is he well?"

"What shall I answer to that?" asked Sister Marion turning to Kit.

"Say that he is greatly changed."

"Will you not come to the telephone yourself, Miss Wallworth?"

Kit rose and took Sister Marion's place.

"Allan is not well," she said.

"Is that Miss Wallworth?"

"Yes."

"Allan not well?"

"Far from it. He is suffering mentally and is greatly changed."

"God pity the lad! Where is he now?"

"I am not at liberty to say. At least not yet. I promised him I would not until——"

"Until?—yes go on."

"Until I can assure him that his return——"

"He fears to return?"

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"Yes, that is the plain truth."

"Tell him there is nothing to fear—nothing. Mr. Ingerson has squared everything."

"I may tell him that from you as a certainty?"

"Yes, as a certainty."

"And——"

"Yes, what else? Any other difficulty in the lad's way?"

"He is ashamed——"

"Ah, yes. It is as I suspected,—that is the real difficulty. But not even shame, Miss Wallworth, must stand in his way. We want him home again, shame or no shame. Tell him that. Our love for him goes beyond every consideration that he can advance to keep him from us. Tell him that, also. And, Miss Wallworth—are you there?"

"Yes—yes."

"Tell poor Allan that our hearts are sore for him and that we are pining for a sight of his dear face again."

"I have told him all that."

"Well?"

"He will return."

"Thank God! thank God! . . . . When, Miss Wallworth? Allan's father is at my ear asking, When?"

"So soon as I can get back to him with your message —to-morrow, if can be."

"Can we not see him to-night? . . . . Can *I* not see him? . . . . Where is he that I may go to him? . . . . Oh, yes, I know the hour is late, but what of that?"

But Kit said No, and turned away from the telephone.

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She had really nothing more to say. She would call on Sister Marion again to-morrow, after having seen Allan. But now she must go home or she would miss the last train to Bridston. Already at home they were no doubt growing anxious about her, but they would be overjoyed to learn that she had discovered Allan.

After Kit had gone Sister Marion again rang up the Calverts.

"I will be with you in half an hour," she said. "Wait up for me. I know it is late, but I have a wonderful story to tell you and I know how anxious you must all be to hear it. Wait up; I am setting off now."

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XL

"FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD"

WHEN Sister Marion arrived that night at the Calverts' she found them all waiting for her in a state of great excitement. They pounced upon her as soon as she entered the dining-room and plied her with questions. But she put them all aside and, sitting down, told her story in as few words as possible. Particularly she emphasised the part Kit had played in Allan's discovery, and spoke of her self-sacrifice with glowing words. In what part of the city Allan lay she knew not, but Kit, disguised past all recognition, had come to her straight from the discovery of Allan, so that Sister Marion judged Allan's hiding-place was in some place where no lady could venture without such caution.

Then Sister Marion told of Kit's condition when she came to the Hall that night. Kit, she impressed upon them, had plainly gone through a great deal in order to rescue Allan and had herself suffered both physically and mentally. In the whole course of her experience as a Sister of the People, Sister Marion had never known one to risk so much for the well-being of another. If the great mission could only have the advantages of Kit's services permanently, only the Great Day would reveal the amount of good she would accomplish. Kit Wallworth

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was whole-hearted; she threw herself into rescue work with all the enthusiasm of her nature, with more than the ardour of one wholly devoted to the work, and with a zeal that might well put the best of them to shame.

"But my boy, Sister, my boy," cried the Reverend Cephas, "tell me of him."

"I am coming to that," said Sister Marion, "but, even at this great crisis, I felt that I must first deliver my soul of my admiration for Kit Wallworth."

"Yes, Kit Wallworth is an extraordinary young lady," said Mr. Calvert, "Personally, I have always thought her a bit flighty, but this has apparently steadied her. May God grant that it may also have pointed out to her the vocation in life to which He has called her! She has talents, evidently."

"You were going to tell us of Allan, Sister?" again put in the Reverend Cephas.

"Kit promises that you may see him to-morrow——"

"Thank God!"

"But I have been thinking it all over as I came along here to-night——"

"Yes?" from the Reverend Cephas eagerly.

"And I am convinced that we ought to make it as easy as possible for Allan to return."

"Certainly, certainly," said the Reverend Cephas, and they all echoed his agreement.

"What can we do?" asked Mr. Calvert.

"Yes, what can we do?" repeated Allan's father.

"It will be a painful ordeal," said Sister Marion, "for Allan to show himself again in the city."

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Mr. Calvert nodded his head vigorously.

"To show himself at once," explained Sister Marion. "But he might do it after a time."

"Yes, after a time," agreed Mr. Calvert, without knowing yet what Sister Marion was driving at.

"If Allan could only go away for a while——"

"Eh?" cried the Reverend Cephas, pricking up his ears.

"If Allan could go away," explained Mr. Calvert. "If, for instance now, Ceph, he could go home with you——"

"Go home with me! God bless him! How glad we should be to have the dear lad with us again," and old Mr. Jepson's eyes filled with glad tears at the bare thought of having his boy under his roof again.

"It would be the very thing, Sister," said Mr. Calvert delightedly. "Do you think we could manage it?"

"I think so, though——"

"Yes?"

"It may take some persuasion on somebody's part to get him to consent to it," and Sister Marion looked up at Edith.

And then they all looked at Edith.

For a moment or two Edith stood silent. Her bosom was swelling and the crystal tears swimming in her eyes. They thought her heart was too full to speak, and that was indeed the truth; but it was filled also with a mighty longing and her brain with a great thought for which she could not find utterance, a thought which maidenly shame held her from uttering. For a moment longer she stood

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and then went forward, put her arms round her mother's neck, and wept without a word.

"Hush! Hush, child!" cried Mrs. Calvert, "I know it; I see it. Who should understand if your mother did not?" and she kissed her child. "It is what I should do myself," she went on stroking the hair back from Edith's forehead, "just what I should do myself, my sweet child. . . . Yes, yes," she went on once more, turning now to the others, "Edith will persuade Allan to come home. . . . And Edith will go home with him; yes, Edith will go with him, and make it home indeed for him. . . . And we will put it into the papers. All the world shall know of it, all the world. . . . Why should the world not know of it? What is there to be ashamed about? It is just what ought to be, just what ought to be. . . . There, there, child, do not cry any more; your mother understands you."

The two old friends, the ministers, stared at each other in great perplexity. They did not understand the mystery, and such heart-to-heart talk was beyond them. But Sister Marion, being a woman also, understood and ran across the room to Edith. Dropping on her knees beside her she caught Edith's hands in her own.

"Edith, dear, what can I say to you!" she cried with great thankfulness. "It will be the perfecting of the salvation that Kit Wallworth has begun for Allan! It will put the top-stone on the finished work! . . . God bless you, Edith, God bless you! It is noble of you, magnificent, Christ-like. And now I may go home to rest. It has been a long day, a hard day, and I am tired

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out. But I go home with a glad heart. . . . Allan Jepson's redemption is in good hands; even for him, under my Edith's sweet influence, the narrowing lust of gold will soon have lost its power."

Three days afterwards, on opening their morning papers, Rushington people rubbed their eyes with astonishment at the announcement of the marriage of Allan Jepson, of that city, and Edith Calvert, only child of the Reverend David Calvert, Methodist minister. They had been married by license and, the announcement went on to say, they had gone to the home of the bridegroom's father at Crosstrees to spend their honeymoon. But no announcement was made of the fact that they did not intend to return to the city or that they were going to settle in Crosstrees. It so happened, however, that the oldest established drapery business in Crosstrees was in the market, and Allan's friends, headed by Mr. Edwin Ingerson, ever the first and foremost in all good work, snapped it up at once on Allan's behalf; and, a month afterwards, Allan was quietly started in his new life as a respectable country tradesman, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" and away from the stress and strain of that life which had narrowed his heart with the lust for gold.

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XLV

TWO YEARS AFTERWARDS

"ALLAN, what can you make of this?" asked his father, looking up from his reading of the First Draft of Stations:—"David Calvert, Crosstrees, supernumerary?"

"My father, a supernumerary?" asked Edith, pausing in the pouring out of a cup of coffee.

"Yes, that is what is down here," answered the Reverend Cephas.

"And set down for Crosstrees, too!" exclaimed Allan, examining the Draft.

"He has never said anything to us about becoming a supernumerary," marvelled Edith.

"No, not a word," said her father-in-law, shaking his head, "not a word, and I cannot understand it."

Just then the house-dog, in his kennel in the yard, began barking loudly.

"Hello! that is Rover," said Freddie Walters, who also had his seat at the breakfast-table, having, for the last twelve months, been Allan's first hand in the business. "The postman is coming, I'll be bound. That dog smells the postman when he is ever so far away. It is really wonderful. Have you ever noticed how he always sets up a barking when the postman is about?"

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Freddie rose and went to the door, and, presently, returned with quite a pile of letters.

"Any for me?" asked the Reverend Cephas.

"Yes, one," answered Freddie, and handed the minister a letter.

"And these are for you, sir," passing Allan several, "and this for you," placing one at Edith's hand. "This last is for me."

"Mine is from your father, Edith," said the minister, glancing at the address on the envelope.

"Oh! then we shall hear something now."

"And mine is from Davy Daggers!" cried Freddie Walters.

"From Davy Daggers!" echoed Allan slowly, a flush coming to his face at the bare mention of the name, "What does he want?"

"I will see now," answered Freddie, and commenced at once to read his letter.

"Who are yours from, dear?" asked Edith.

"All business letters apparently," answered Allan, "except this one," holding it up. "This is from Mr. Ingerson."

"Oh! that good man. Mine is from Sister Marion."

"Davy Daggers is in a bad way again," said Freddie presently.

"What is to do with him now?" asked Allan.

"Oh! hard up as usual. Says he has not been inside a theatre for ages. Wants the loan of a sovereign."

"The loan of one!" smiled Edith.

"A sovereign will do Davy Daggers no good," said

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Allan, "But," throwing one on the table, "send it to him, Freddie, send it to him."

"I should do nothing of the kind," said Edith. "It will only go the way all the others have gone with him."

"Well, let it," said Allan, "let it. I am not the one to tell Davy he must toe the line. He will never do it, he will never do it, and will go his own way to the end."

"It would be better for him if he did," said Edith.

"It was better for me."

"Could you not write to Mr. Rosson about him?"

Allan shook his head. "It would be no use," he said. "Daggers is one of those who will never be saved."

At that moment the minister broke in on the conversation.

"Yes, yes; it is quite true, children," he said. "My old friend David Calvert has asked to become a supernumerary and he intends settling down here in Crosstrees so that he may be near me. But such an extraordinary letter I never read. I do not know what the Stationing Committee would think about it or the Conference. But listen! Hear the letter for yourselves.

"My Dear Cephas,

"I am going to give it all up. There is no use of trying any longer, and I have asked to be allowed to 'sit down.' The real, plain, unvarnished truth is, Ceph, circuit Methodism is played out so far as the great cities are concerned, and it is impossible for any circuit minister to compete with the great Missions. . . . Mark, I am not saying one word against them—God forbid!—but the

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broad fact remains that the Missions are the ruin of circuit life and work. I am not the only one who feels this; others feel it also, though they keep pegging away, trying to bolster up circuit Methodism. But where's the use? I have done the same thing for years and have failed; miserably failed. One by one the different chapels in Rushington are being passed over to the Mission, and those which now remain are but poorly attended and almost lifeless. I cannot stand it any longer, this havoc, the devastation of circuit work. It is too depressing—it is killing. I say, let all the chapels go over to the Mission; it will be best for them and it cannot be worse for us circuit ministers. Others say it will also be best for Methodism; perhaps it will; I cannot go so far as this yet, though I know the Mission will fill the empty chapels from floor to ceiling. But, in my judgment, there is something about circuit Methodism which one will never be able to find in the great Missions, a connexional spirit and a tone wholly lovable and for the general good. But enough, or you will think me grumbling. I only state facts as I find them, and I state them to you, Ceph, to explain to you why I am going to 'sit down.' In September I will, D. V., be with you in Crosstrees, and then we can talk these great matters over together and live over again the happy days of our circuit life when there were no . . . No, I will not say another word upon this subject. Now to other matters. . . ."

A deep silence fell upon the little company for a while

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after the reading of this letter, during which Mr. Jepson sat shaking his head thoughtfully.

"It is a strange letter—a sad letter," he said presently, "Yet it but expresses the inevitable. I have foreseen it for a long time, ever since I first visited Rushington, and what has befallen my old friend will also befall many another circuit minister."

A customer came into the shop and Freddie Walters was called away.

"What has Mr. Ingerson got to say, Allan?"

"He writes chiefly in answer to my letter about Fairclough."

"Well?"

"He has taken Charlie into his office."

Edith's eye filled with tears.

"When will that dear man's kindness end?" she exclaimed.

"Mr. Ingerson, is that?" asked the minister.

"Yes."

"That man lives only to do good."

"That is so," said Allan. "He has now made Charlie his private secretary and has given him a new start in life."

"I hope," said the minister, "he will prove himself worthy of it."

"He will; I am sure he will," said Allan enthusiastically. "Charlie Fairclough never forgets a kindness."

"There is just one jarring note in Mr. Ingerson's letter," said Allan presently.

"What is that?"

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"He mentions Hugh Bottomley."

"Well, what of him?"

"He has left the firm."

"Left the firm!"

"Yes; listen: 'The worst feature about the whole business is the poor simpleton's miserliness. It seems he has hoarded his gold at home and loves it to such an extent that he has not the courage to leave it for a single moment, even in order to go out to business to earn more to add to it. He is an awful example of what the narrowing lust of gold will do for a man.'"

Someone was moving in the bedroom upstairs, and Edith held up her hand.

"It is nurse," she said presently. "Baby has wakened."

"You have not told us yet," said Allan, "of what Sister Marion writes about."

"Guess?" said Edith, her face full of gladness.

"She is going to pay us her long promised visit?"

"You have guessed right. She wants to come next week. Can we do with her?"

"What a question, Edith! You know very well there will always be a warm welcome in this home for Sister Marion. But what about her work? I thought it was impossible for her to leave that even for a day."

"Yes, that was so once, but not since Kit Wallworth joined her in the work. Miss Wallworth, you know, is a capable, whole-hearted Sister of the People. She is greatly beloved and trusted by everyone."

"Poor Kit!" sighed Allan, and just then the nurse brought baby in.

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